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A MOTHER OF CZARS

A SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF MARIE FEODOROWNA, WIFE OF PAUL I. AND MOTHER OF ALEXANDER I. AND NICHOLAS I.

BY MRS. COLQUHOUN GRANT

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"THE FRENCH NOBLESSE OF THE XVIII. CENTURY"

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A mother of czars : a sketch of the life of
1905.

PREFACE

THE life of Princess Dorothea of Wurtemberg, afterwards known as Marie Feodorowna (the name given to her when she became Grand-Duchess of Russia), has never yet been published.

The story of her childhood in her home at Montbéliard in Alsace, and that of her early married life, have been graphically described by the pen of her girlhood's friend, Lanele Baronne d'Oberkirch.

An interesting feature in the life of Marie Feodorowna during these early years was the prolonged tour which she and the Grand-Duke Paul Petrowitz took when they visited the principal Courts of Europe under the title of Comte and Comtesse du Nord. This tour is mentioned in all the histories of the period, but the details of it, with many interesting stories, have only been described by her devoted friend the Baronne d'Oberkirch, who accompanied her as lady-in-waiting.

During the reign of Catherine II. of Russia the Grand-Duke and his wife lived in great retirement at the Palace of Gatschina, near St. Petersburg.

The Empress, being exceedingly jealous of her son, would not allow him to take any part in the management of affairs. There Marie Feodorowna devoted herself to the bringing up of her large family of children, though directly after the period of infancy their imperious grandmother insisted on having the sole charge of their education.

Marie Feodorowna reigned as Czarina for five years only.

In 1801 Paul was assassinated by a band of conspirators, and his son, Alexander I., ascended the throne of Russia.

The early portions of this book, and the account of the tour taken by the Comte and Comtesse du Nord, are translated from the "Life of the Baronne d'Oberkirch," edited by her grandson, the Comte de Montbrisson. Most of my authorities are French works, published in the early part of the nineteenth century, such as "History of Catherine II.," by Castera, "Anecdotes sur la Cour de Russie par Scherer," "Mémoires Secrètes sur la Russie de C. Masson," "Mémoires du Comte de Segur," etc. I am also indebted to some works of later date, which throw a little light on the subject, but though some of these books were written not long after Marie Feodorowna's death, none of them give any detailed account of her life, either private or public.

The interest of historians in the Russian Royal

Family seems to have waned with the death of the great Catherine, and thus full details of the later years of Marie Feodorowna are wanting.

This book, however, does not profess to be a complete biography, but only a sketch, for which I have gleaned from these various sources such materials as are available. Contemporary writers took but little notice of one whose virtues were conspicuous in comparison to the vices of her predecessors; yet her sons owed to her all that was best in their characters, and whatever may have been their faults, they were far in advance of the Czars who had preceded them.

"Revelations sur l'Empereur Nicholas," published during his lifetime, furnished me with information for the very short account I have written of that Emperor, but as his mother died two years after his accession, the history of his reign does not properly enter into this Memoir.

Marie Feodorowna died November 5th, 1828, in the seventieth year of her age.

A belief was prevalent at the time that Paul I. was not the son of Peter III., husband of Catherine the Great, and Castera, in his history of this Empress, brings forward strong evidence tending to prove that Paul could only have been the son of one of her lovers, presumably Orloff, and other historians are of the same opinion. Without attempting to vouch for the accuracy of this

statement, it may be observed that if there be any truth in the suggestion thus made, this brief account of Marie Feodorowna becomes of greater interest, as in that case she and Paul would be the real founders of the Imperial dynasty, the direct descendant of which now rules over All the Russias in the person of Nicholas II.

In these pages I have sought to dwell on the pleasing, rather than the dark side of things Russian, and, avoiding the terrible stories that others have already ably told, I have attempted to picture scenes which have not been made so well known as they deserve.

The purport of this book is to bring before its readers some account of Russian life at the close of the eighteenth, and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, and it portrays the home life at the Court of St. Petersburg under the wholesome rule and moral influence of a wise and virtuous woman. Marie Feodorowna has the distinction of having reigned and ruled during the lives of three successive sovereigns, thus earning the right to bear the proud title of "A Mother of Czars."

C. G.

DINARD, *January*, 1905.

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HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE ROMANOFF DYNASTY

A SHORT account of the family who now reign over Russia may be of interest in connection with this Memoir. It has been such an ill-fated race, as the genealogical table gives proof, so many of its rulers having come to a violent end, that the very name is synonymous with misfortune.

But it has not been connected with misfortune alone, for the Romanoffs have held that throne, one of the most brilliant in Europe, for close on three hundred years, and some among the Czars have been known to the world for deeds and by titles, which have carried down their fame to posterity.

The first ruler in Russia who took the name of Czar[1] was Ivan IV. of the House of Ruric,

[1] The sovereigns of Russia had previously been called Great Princes, "Veliki Kniaz." Czar is a corrupt orthography of this title.

better known, however, by the ominous title of Ivan the Terrible. The possession of the shores of the Baltic was the object of his ambition, and he fought hard for supremacy in the north, but his feeble and half-imbecile son Feodor, who succeeded him, failed to carry on the schemes begun by his father.

When Feodor died without issue, the Ruric line having come to an end, various pretenders arose in the country. Sweden and Poland were at that time both struggling for supremacy in Russia, and the patriotic party who would not submit to foreign rule, aided by the Boyars, or military chiefs, proceeded in 1613 to elect a Czar, and chose a young man of good family and noble birth, but of no great standing, being only the son of the Metropolitan of Rostoff. This was Michael Romanoff, a mere boy of about sixteen years of age.

Their choice appears to have been a wise one, he grew up to be a man of virtuous habit and kindly disposition, and his reign was remarkable for an enlightened policy very different from that of his predecessors.

His son Alexis, also of a mild and benevolent character, was a worthy successor, but his reign

was far less peaceful, being disturbed by marauding incursions of the Cossacks and internal rebellions.

Alexis was the founder of the Russian Navy. Previous to this reign, no ships had ever been built in Russia on scientific principles. The Czar brought over shipwrights from Holland and England, and began the work which was afterwards the great life interest of his youngest son, Peter I.

Alexis was succeeded in 1676 by his son Theodore III., who left no children, and the throne was divided between his brother Ivan and his half-brother Peter, both mere boys. Ivan, the elder of the two, was neither mentally nor physically capable of governing, which was the reason of this unusual arrangement, and their sister, Sophia, a very able woman, of extraordinary and versatile talents, was in reality the ruler of the Empire. It is said that while involved in State intrigues she wrote a tragedy which is still preserved. In 1689 Ivan resigned, and Peter became sole Czar.

With the life of this remarkable man, known, and with good reason, as Peter the Great, the real history of the Empire of Russia begins. His

one desire was to extend and consolidate his power, and in spite of the reverses of his army against both the Turks and the Swedes, his indomitable perseverance never gave way. He founded St. Petersburg, drove the Swedes out of Finland, and increased the Russian Navy, having learnt ship-building himself for the purpose of thoroughly understanding the best methods of constructing men-of-war.

He learnt the trade both at Saardam and in England, which he visited in 1698, and was very well received by William and Mary, who put a royal yacht at his service. Sayes Court, the property of Mr. Evelyn, of Wootton, was placed at his disposal, being conveniently situated near the dockyard of Deptford.

Mr. Evelyn records in his diary that he received £150 damages, which was compensation for injury done to his famous holly-edge, one of the Czar's favourite recreations having been to demolish the hedges by driving through them in a wheelbarrow.

Peter was addicted to drink, and was of coarse and dissolute habits, he was also a despot with a violent temper, but none the less the civilisation of Russia dates from this reign. He endowed

universities and colleges, and established commercial relations with all parts of the globe. In 1725 he abdicated his throne in favour of his wife Catherine, who, originally a peasant girl, became first the mistress, and then the wife of the Czar. She could neither read nor write, but supported her high station as if she had been born to the dignity. Her son, Peter II., succeeded at her death in 1727, but he only reigned three years, and, dying at the age of fourteen, the male line of the Romanoffs became extinct.

Many rival claimants now arose and disputed the throne. Ann, Duchess of Courland, and daughter of Ivan V., was finally elected, under certain conditions, namely, that she should not marry nor appoint a successor, which conditions she subscribed to, and, like her predecessors, she was styled "Autocrat of all the Russias." The choice made on this occasion had been far from a good one. Ann was pleasure-loving and indolent, and her Court given over to frivolity and dissipation. A low intriguer named Biren acquired a great ascendency over her towards the end of her life. He was of quite low origin, but by dint of flattery had become all-powerful

in the palace, and under his influence the greatest atrocities were committed.

The Princess Anne, niece of the Czarina, who had married the Prince of Brunswick, gave birth to a son, and the Empress determined to make this child her heir. But shortly after it was born she fell suddenly ill, and Biren succeeded in making her sign a decree on her death-bed that he should be Regent.

The infant was therefore proclaimed Czar in 1740 by the name of Ivan VI., but Biren had no intention of carrying out his trust. He wished to secure the throne for himself, and for that reason determined to marry Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great.

The people, however, rose in revolt against this adventurer, they insisted that the parents of the young Czar should be joint Regents, and they succeeded in defeating Biren, who was sent into exile.

Princess Elizabeth, however, who had seen the sceptre dangling before her gaze, had no mind to retire into obscurity. With the help of her friends, and having gained over the guards, she seized the Emperor and his parents, and caused them to be imprisoned in the Fortress of Riga.

As the heiress of Peter the Great, Elizabeth considered herself the rightful occupier of the throne of her ancestors, and she was proclaimed Empress in 1741. Her reign was a series of wars and intrigues, and her Court was corrupt and licentious. Mercy and justice were unknown during her rule, though from feelings of pretended humanity she abolished capital punishment. Her taste for architecture, however, greatly contributed to the embellishment of St. Petersburg.

In default of a direct heir she sent for her nephew, the Duke of Holstein, son of her eldest sister, and grandson of Peter the Great. On him she bestowed the name of Peter, and appointed him her successor. She arranged a marriage for him with Princess Sophia Augusta of Anhalt Zerbst, who was baptized into the Greek Church under the name of Catherine, a name destined to hold a very prominent place in the history of Europe. It was not, however, till they had been married ten years that a son was born, afterwards Paul I.

Peter III. succeeded his aunt in 1762. He was of a weak and depraved disposition, and his wife after a time caused him to be imprisoned, and

ascended the throne in his place. This masterful woman, known to history as Catherine the Great, reigned over Russia for thirty-four eventful years.

During that time the Turks, who had long been enemies of Russia, were completely defeated, and the Crimea was annexed as part of the Empire. In league with Austria and Prussia, Russia set about the partition of Poland, which country was finally subjugated. This Empress held much more enlightened views than her predecessors. She had literary and artistic tastes, and her great ambition was to excel as a law-giver. The condition of the agricultural classes was improved under Catherine, and she did much for the civilisation of her country. In her public capacity she was a great ruler, but her private character was not above reproach.

Her son, Paul I., succeeded her in 1796. He married Princess Dorothea of Wurtemberg, afterwards known as Marie Feodorowna. This Czarina has the distinction of having lived and ruled during the reigns of three Czars, her husband and two of her sons. Paul's behaviour at the end of his life was remarkable for an eccentricity

amounting to madness. He was murdered in 1801.

His son, Alexander I., succeeded him, and, aided by his mother, ruled successfully for many years. He also was a patron of art and literature, and encouraged education. The principal features of this reign were the war with France, Napoleon's march on Moscow, and his famous and disastrous retreat. Also Alexander's entry into Paris with the Allies, who placed Louis XVIII. on the throne of France.

Alexander left no son, and was succeeded by his younger brother, Nicholas I., in 1825, Constantine, the second brother, having resigned his right to the crown from personal motives. The Empress Marie Feodorowna, their mother, died in 1828.

ROMANOFF DYNASTY

Michael Romanoff
elected Czar
1613–1645

Alexis
1645–1676

Theodore III.
1676–1682

Joint reign of
two half-brothers,
Ivan and Peter
1682–1689

Ivan resigned

Peter I.
(surnamed the Great)
1689–1725

(*Continued at* **A**.)

A

Catherine I.
1725–1727

Peter II.
1727–1730

Ann
1730–1740

Ivan VI.
1740–1741

Elizabeth
1741–1762

Peter III.
1762 (assassinated)

Catherine II. (surnamed the Great)
1762–1796

(*Continued at* **B**.)

B

Paul
1796–1801 (assassinated)
Married Sophia Dorothea of Wurtemberg, afterwards known as Marie Feodorowna.

- Alexander I. 1801–1825 Died without issue.
- Constantine Renounced his right to the throne Died without issue.
- Alexandra
- Helene
- Anna
- Catherine
- Maria
- Olga
- Nicholas I. 1825–1855
  - Alexander II. 1855–1881 (assassinated)
    - Alexander III. 1881–1894 Married Princess Dagmar of Denmark.
      - Nicholas II. Married Princess Alix of Hesse-Darmstadt. Present Czar.
- Michael

A MOTHER OF CZARS

CHAPTER I

IN 1759 there was born into the family of the Duke of Wurtemberg, Prince of Montbéliard, an infant Princess, who was destined in after years to reign as Czarina on the Imperial throne of Russia, which is occupied by her direct descendants at the present time.

This family was a very ancient one. The original house of the Counts of Montbéliard became extinct in 1162, but was revived again, two centuries later, when an heiress of the race married and enriched a Count of Wurtemberg whose family became ducal a hundred years after, and the name of Montbéliard was joined to that of Wurtemberg.

In 1769 Duke Frederic-Eugene of Wurtemberg arrived at Montbéliard with his family. He had at that time been married fifteen years to the Princess Sophia Dorothea, daughter of the Margrave of Brandenburg-Schwedt, niece of Frederick the Great.

Montbéliard was the capital town of a countship of that name, and was situated between the Principality of Porentrug (which formed the Bishopric of Basle), Sundgau Lorraine, and Franche Comté, and had formerly belonged to the Empire of Germany, but was now an independent province.

The inhabitants of this somewhat neglected country felt as if a blessing had been sent them direct from heaven when the Duke and his family took up their abode at the Castle of Montbéliard. Their kindness of heart, their solicitude for their subjects' welfare, and their liberality towards them soon brought forth a rich harvest of abundance and prosperity.

The title of Duke of Wurtemberg was usually given only to the reigning Sovereign, who lived at Stuttgard, and Duke Frederic-Eugene and his wife were always styled Prince and Princess of Montbéliard in their own home.

The Prince was at that time thirty-seven years of age. From his mother, a Princess of Thurn and Taxis, he had inherited a considerable amount of talent. Owing to her careful bringing up, his mind was well stored with knowledge of every kind. This Princess was celebrated throughout Europe for her wit and charms. She was vivacious and gay as well as clever, and some of her attributes may well have descended to her granddaughter, though no mention is made of her having even

lived to see the child. In her day she had attracted much notice, indeed, the chronicles of the Courts of Germany abound with stories of her ardent love-affairs. Scandal did not always pass her by, and she was credited with many weaknesses as regarded the opposite sex. Anyway, she was a woman of immense personal fascination. After her son had covered himself with glory in the service of Frederick II. of Prussia during the Seven Years' War, she negotiated a marriage for him with the Princess Sophia Dorothea. They fell in love with each other at once, and it proved a most happy union, the Princess being a model of accomplishments, grace, and every virtue.

Duke Frederic-Eugene was the third son of his father, Duke Charles-Alexander, and he had been originally intended for the priesthood, but his tastes did not lie in that direction. Both he and his brother Louis-Eugene served with distinction in the Army. Their elder brother Charles-Eugene was made reigning Duke of Wurtemberg at the early age of sixteen by a dispensation of the Emperor Charles VI., their father having died while they were yet children. All three brothers bore the name of Eugene, Duke Charles-Alexander having had an immense admiration for Prince Eugene of Savoy. They were all brought up as Roman Catholics, their father having embraced that religion, without, however, having changed

anything in the constitution of his Duchy, which remained Protestant.

When Duke Frederic-Eugene and his wife came to reside at Montbéliard, she was thirty-three, and already the mother of five sons and three daughters, the eldest of whom, Princess Dorothea, the subject of this Memoir, was just ten years old. The Castle of Montbéliard was mainly of modern date—at least, it had been rebuilt on the site of a citadel perched on a precipitous rock which dominated the town, and which rendered it almost impregnable. This fortress had been dismantled in 1677 by order of Louis XIV.

The castle was composed of two parts, separated by the Church of Saint-Mainbœuf, which stood in the same enclosure. The oldest part was called the *vieil-châtel* or the *châtel-derrière*, and the other the *châtel-neuf* or the *châtel-devant*, owing to their relative positions in regard to the church. Around the castle were cedars of Lebanon, said to have been brought from the Holy Land by a Count of Montbéliard in 1400.

The courtyard was planted with linden trees and horse chestnuts, which filled it with a grateful shade. The apartments were spacious and lofty, but very plainly furnished, for the magnificence and wealth of the old race no longer existed. The suite of their Serene Highnesses were also somewhat poorly lodged.

Here, in this peaceful home, little Dorothea grew up, surrounded by her brothers and sisters, leading an absolutely simple life, and having as her chief companion a girl of her own age, who lived in the neighbourhood, Henriette de Waldner, with whom she formed a lifelong friendship, and who continued to be as a sister and an equal to Dorothea, even after she was raised to the exalted rank she was destined to hold.

It is chiefly owing to the correspondence between these two (the letters having been fortunately preserved) that we learn a great deal of contemporary history and manners both in France and Russia.

The happy band of children, with no thought or care for the future, played round the old walls and pursued their studies together.

The housekeeper, Madame Hendel, was a great feature in the family, and a most devoted adherent to it. The children used to call her Madame de Pompadour, not that she merited the comparison, the meaning of which they naturally did not understand, but because of the pomp and majesty of her demeanour and her display of finery. She wore dresses of stiff purple silk, trimmed with flame-coloured ribbons, the rustle of which could be heard all over the castle whenever she left her room. She thought herself the first lady in Europe, after her mistress the Princess, and never

would speak of herself in the first person—she thought it vulgar and derogatory. She always said, "*They* have done this," "*They* have been there," she was not aware that in so doing she was imitating M. de Turenne, and probably would not have felt flattered had she been told so. What was a mere Viscount to her?—quite a small personage of no importance compared to her illustrious patrons. She was for ever boasting of the power and vast estates of her beloved mistress, and when she pronounced the word *vast* her mouth was stretched to its utmost limit. When Princess Dorothea became engaged to be married to the Czarowitz, she nearly burst with pride.

The young Princes had a tutor, the Baron de Maucler, a very distinguished soldier, who was a great favourite with the whole family. His wife was a Swiss, descended from a companion of Peter the Great. The little Princess often asked M. de Maucler to tell her stories about Peter I. and Russia, she had a most ardent and almost prophetic curiosity about that country.

When the elder boys required further tuition, the Duke sent them to Lausanne under the care of M. de Maucler.

In 1770, in the month of May, the Princess of Montbéliard gave birth to her sixth son, Charles-Frederic. The town was illuminated in honour of the occasion, this being the first prince born

in their midst, and addresses of congratulation were presented to the parents.

The children revelled in the sugar plums which were distributed according to the custom at such times, and which were showered on them, Madame Hendel having received at least six dozen boxes, which she put away, rather than demean herself by sharing them with the servants.

Shortly before this event, Marie Antoinette arrived at Strasburg, which was an occasion of great excitement. Her entry into France by that route filled the good people of Alsace with delight. Henriette de Waldner was present at the reception with her father, but none of the rest of the party from Montbéliard were there, partly owing to the state of health of the Duchess, who was on the eve of her confinement, and partly because the etiquette of the Court of France was so severe for strangers that no foreign princes ever willingly attended such functions, unless absolutely obliged to do so, as they were allowed no place suited to their rank. They could not sit down at table with the King and Queen, nor was any personal notice taken of them by the Sovereign. Those among them who did visit at Versailles always remained incognito, and took a feigned name, so that their rank should not be called in question nor they themselves confounded with the crowd of courtiers. Even relations of the Queen appeared

at her receptions in this fashion. Anyway, the Court of Montbéliard was anxious to avoid annoyance, so did not put in an appearance.

Henriette wrote a glowing account of her visit to Strasburg. The people were wild with joy at the sight of their future Queen, and hailed Madame la Dauphine with every demonstration of loyalty. Henriette, in company with other girls of her own rank, was presented to Marie Antoinette, who received them with great courtesy, asked their names, and distributed among them some superb bouquets, which had been sent by the Chambers and the Senate of the town. Henriette preserved some of these flowers carefully, and gave them to Princess Dorothea.

It was at the frontier that the Dauphine was received in a tent hung with tapestries representing the story of Medea and Jason and the massacres which ensued. The young Princess at once remarked on these melancholy pictures, and declared them to be a prognostication of evil, but she bravely set herself to please the inhabitants of her new country, and repressed her tears as she parted with the members of her Austrian household. "Do not speak German, Monsieur," she said to M. d'Antigny, who began reading her an address in that language, "from this day forward I understand no language save French."

At Strasburg she was sumptuously lodged in

the episcopal palace of the old Bishop the Cardinal Prince de Rohan, whose nephew and successor, Prince Louis, attained a most uneviable celebrity, owing to the miserable history of the necklace, which cost the Queen so dear. Strange that her first halting-place should have been under the roof of the man who caused her such a fatal injury. It was indeed one of the ironies of life.

The following year the Duke began building a summer residence at Étupes, a pretty village on the road to Basle, four miles from Montbéliard. He was so eager about this work that he succeeded in having it finished within the twelvemonth. It was a most beautiful house, and the gardens were laid out like a lovely landscape.[1]

While the building was proceeding the reigning Duke of Wurtemberg, Charles-Eugene, arrived on a visit to his brother. This Prince had begun too soon to hold the reins of government, and the sense of power had intoxicated him, he was surrounded by seductions of all kinds, and the Court of Stuttgard became one of the most brilliant and extravagant in Germany; but at the time of his visit to Étupes he had already repented of the error of his ways, and was doing his best to repair his mistake. He was extremely

[1] The plan of Étupes and its gardens is engraved in a work entitled "Plans of the most Picturesque Gardens in England and France." By J. Kraft, 1809.

handsome and a universal favourite, but had been always under the dominion of women.

This visit was made an occasion of great ceremony and rejoicing, and all sorts of *fêtes* were held. The standard of Wurtemberg floated over the castle, and flags were flying everywhere. Audiences were held from morning till evening, and His Highness's patience and courtesy gave great satisfaction. At night the town was illuminated. A cavalry corps of gentlemen formed themselves into the Duke's escort, and at his departure rode with him to the frontier. Every one had been charmed with his visit, none more so than Princess Dorothea, to whom he gave a very handsome ring.

It was not till after the birth of yet another son that the family took possession of Etupes. By this time the plants had grown and the gardens had improved. The walls of the house also had lost the crude whiteness of new lime, and had toned somewhat in colour.

The Orangery was spoken of as one of the finest in Germany. The dairy was built in the shape of a Swiss châlet, and adorned with superb vases of *faenza*, a pottery of the sixteenth century, rather coarsely made, but much prized by connoisseurs, as it was very rare.

The Duchess had conceived the idea of building a Temple to Flora in the grounds. It was covered

with roses, climbing specimens of which were trained up from the sides to the roof, and it became a perfect bower of sweet-scented flowers. There she loved to sit and read.

The natural grottoes of Étupes, which were full of stalactites, were at night often illuminated, when they sparkled with a million rays, they were situated on little islands in the middle of the river, and had always been considered one of the chief curiosities of the country. These islands were connected with the land by fantastic Chinese bridges. A *fête* was to be held there in honour of the birth of the last child, and great preparations were made. While these were in progress the children were sent to spend their days in a cottage in the forest. It had been a charcoal-burner's hut, and the outside was in conformity with the object for which it was built, but the Duchess had such infinite taste that she turned the inside into a little bijou. All the decorations were rustic and simple, but charmingly arranged and carried out, and it was intended for a summer schoolroom.

Princess Dorothea was quite determined to sleep there one night. Madame Hendel was horrified at the idea, and gave vent to cries like a screech-owl in her wrath. She veiled her face with her scarf, and declared that this freak, if carried out, would lower the dignity of the reigning house

of Wurtemberg. But in the end she had to give way. She could not, however, get over it, and for many years after her young mistress had become Grand-Duchess of Russia, whenever she passed by the cottage, she would point to it with a dramatic gesture, and exclaim, "To think that the future Empress of all the Russias slept there!"

This summer was the happiest the children ever spent in their lives, wandering between their rustic cottage and the Temple of Flora, where, among the roses, a statue of the goddess had been erected, which they used to deck with garlands of wild-flowers. They turned the lawns into bowling-greens, to the despair of the gardeners, and fed the birds in the aviaries till they tamed them completely. The parrots, which they taught to speak, must have learnt much juvenile nonsense from the young Princes. Thus free from cares and the trammels of rank, the children lived through the sunny hours in contentment and happiness.

When, in after years, this large and joyous family had dispersed, a pillar was erected in a corner of the grounds, and the initials of each child were engraved on it. How often must the Princess of Montbéliard have stood in front of that little monument with tears in her eyes at the thought of those who would never return!

One day, while the children were busy milking

the cows, a page came to tell the Princess Dorothea that a hermit, lately settled in a neighbouring hermitage, desired to have the honour of a visit from her.

"What—at once!" she asked.

"Yes, Madam, if your Highness is willing."

"Is he waiting for me? but how about the fresh milk I was going to have?"

"Could your Highness not take it first?"

"It would be better perhaps to carry some to the hermit. Come, Lanele,[1] I know it can be only a joke of my brothers, but they shall see how I will revenge myself."

The hermitage was built on slightly rising ground, from which there was a charming view over the surrounding country, and the bell was sounding from the small belfry tower.

The page preceded the Princess and Lanele, and answered all their questions with, "Your Highness will see."

This piqued their curiosity; but nevertheless they fully expected to find the young Princes awaiting them, and started back with astonishment at the entrance on finding the reigning Duke of Wurtemberg sitting there.

[1] Henriette de Waldner, afterwards Baronne d'Oberkirch, was given the name of "Lanele" by the young Princess—one of her little brothers, who could not speak plain, having called Henriette so when dressed for a fancy ball as a "Catalane," from which came "Lane" or "Lanele." The name stuck to her always.

This was one of his surprise visits, for he never could arrive like other people, and enjoyed a joke above everything. The Duke received the girls most politely in his hermitage, and to carry out his *rôle* pretended to foretell the future.

"You, Princess, will marry an old Elector, blind and lame, who will not allow you to receive your friends, and will fill your Court with old fogies, so that he may never be eclipsed by any one in your eyes. You, Countess Henriette, will remain a canoness all your life, or perhaps you will marry the Elector's chaplain, a toothless and withered old stick. This is what I see and predict."

"Do you see nothing but that, reverend father?" cried the laughing Princess.

"I see a very brilliant star, it is yours, and shines above that of your friend. Indeed, I never saw such a galaxy of stars!"

The Duke paid a long visit to his brother on this occasion. He waited for the *fête*, which for Alsace was quite a grand affair. They had ballet-dancers from Vienna, who were to perform the celebrated Ballet of Medea. The Duke, who had seen Vestris take part in this, was much amused; to the people at Étupes it was a more magnificent performance than they had ever seen in their lives.

Duke Charles, on his departure, left as a legacy to the country a new law, for which he received

the blessings of all the agricultural population. Up to that time the farmers were not allowed to alter the existing system of cultivation on their lands, which, of course, in many instances, was a great hardship, and the permission to exercise their judgment in the matter was of immense advantage to the province. This Prince's rule over his dominions, after he had given up his youthful follies, was a very benevolent and wise one, and his name was long held in grateful remembrance. He also named his brother, the Prince of Montbéliard, Stadtholder, which was a very popular appointment.

The next event of European importance was the death of the old King, Louis XV., and his grandson, Louis XVI., ascended the throne May 10th, 1774.

This new reign began full of hope and with every prospect of being a brilliant one. The people of Alsace were particularly joyful, as they had never forgotten the arrival of Marie Antoinette at Strasburg, and took a particular and personal interest in their new Sovereigns. But all did not share in the same feeling. The Baron de Wurmser, an Austrian general, who, however, had been born and lived in Alsace, drew attention to the fact that the Princesses of the House of Austria had very seldom brought happiness to France.

The mourning for the late King put a stop for a time to a rather ridiculous fashion then in vogue,

called *poufs au sentiment.* This was a head-dress into which persons introduced whatever was most precious to them, a miniature of a daughter or a mother, or the picture of a favourite dog or canary, and the whole was made up with the hair of a father or a lover. It was an absurd fashion, and Princess Dorothea would not give in to it, though one day out of mischief she appeared with a picture of a woman with a bunch of keys at her side fastened among her luxuriant curls. This she declared was Madame Hendel. This latter considered the likeness perfect, and was overwhelmed with pride and joy.

The year succeeding the coronation was marked by a series of accidents and disasters among the little circle in Alsace. The sudden death of the Duc des Deux Ponts, who was killed while stag-hunting, was a real misfortune to all who knew him. It was M. de Wurmser who brought the news to the castle, and filled them with grief. Another friend, the Baron de Pirch, head of one of the first families in Pomerania, was killed in a duel at Strasburg. He was a great authority on Army tactics, and had written books on the subject. A brother officer's jealousy of his superior talents was the sole cause of the quarrel which ended so fatally.

The conduct of the Margrave of Bayreuth also was a cause of great annoyance to the Prince and

Princess of Montbéliard, he had brought Mdlle. Clairon, the actress, away from Paris, and, to the scandal of all the nobility, had induced her to give up the theatre, and had appointed her governess to his children. This the Princess considered an insult to herself and to all his relations, but no one could succeed in making him listen to reason.

Princess Dorothea had now entered into her sixteenth year. The charming child had grown into a still more charming maiden. Her intelligence had developed, but her heart was unchanged, ever loving and tender. Her conversation had become more serious, especially with her friend Countess Henriette, she was full of sympathy with all that was good, and enthusiastic about all that was beautiful, and quite fulfilled the hopes of her parents, by whom she had been most carefully brought up. The first real break and change in her life occurred that summer, and this was occasioned by the Princess of Montbéliard going to Potsdam on a visit to her uncle Frederick the Great. She was desirous to see her eldest son Fritz, who was already in the Prussian Service, and also to introduce her second son Louis to his great-uncle. She did not take her daughter with her. Dorothea was still too young to be introduced at Court, and the anxious mother wished to keep her as long as possible in the safe seclusion of home. The Princess started on her journey with state

befitting her rank. She was accompanied by her two ladies, Mdlle. Grollmann and Mdlle. Schilling, and her doctor M. Bertaud.

Mdlle. Grollmann was a person of a most lively and cheerful disposition. Dorothea had christened her "Freudmann" in consequence. The children were all fond of her, but their real favourite was Mdlle. Schilling. They called her "Tille" or "Tilline," and to the end of her life she remained the devoted friend of Dorothea.[1]

The doctor seems to have greatly enjoyed his visit to the Court of Prussia, for a letter of his to his old father has been preserved, in which he details his adventures, and speaks with the greatest admiration of "Sans Souci," which to his mind far surpassed Versailles. Tilline kept up a regular correspondence with Princess Dorothea, the Duchess being often unable to write, and told her everything that she thought would amuse her. The following is one of the incidents related:

One morning, when the Duchess was staying at Berlin, a knock was heard at the door of her apartment. Mdlle. Schilling went to see who was there. At the same moment King Frederick opened it roughly, and their heads were knocked together. Mdlle. Schilling, who was naturally very shy, was so startled that in her fright she slammed the door

[1] Mdlle. Schilling afterwards married the Baron de Benckendorf.

in his face, and gave a cry that frightened the Duchess. The King, however, came in laughing, and made a great joke of the little incident. He had come to announce to the Princess of Montbéliard that he had named her son Louis for a Lieutenant-Colonelcy in the Prussian infantry.

Prince Louis was greatly elated at this, and still more pleased when all his relatives gave him costly presents to commemorate this his first start in life. His aunts, the Landgravine of Hesse-Cassel and the Princess of Brandenburg-Schwedt, sisters of his mother, gave him a pair of carriage-horses and a handsome white charger.

During her mother's absence, Dorothea kept up a very regular correspondence with her, telling her all the news of the day from France. This was the only means at that period by which absent friends could be kept informed of what was going on in their own country. They were not the letters a young girl would write now-a-days. Princess Dorothea wrote of the anointing of Louis XVI. and of the appointment of M. de Malesherbes to the Ministry, in the place of the Duc de la Vrillière, who, after fifty-five years' service, was to retire on a pension of six thousand livres. "All France applauds this appointment," writes the Princess, and she quotes an epigram made on the Duc de la Vrillière which appeared in the

form of an epitaph. His full name was Phelippeaux St. Florentine la Vrillière.

> Ci-git un petit homme à l'air assez commun,
> Ayant porté trois noms, sans en laisser aucun.

Dorothea at that time was pursuing a strict course of study, which in after years fitted her well for the exalted position she was called upon to fill. She rose at six in the morning, and with her friend employed the early hours in reading. The "Histoire Universelle," of the Abbé Millot, and the "Caractères" of La Bruyère were among the books they read together. They also played quartettes of Schenkel on the clavecin.[1] Then followed the morning walk, in which they were accompanied by young Prince Eugene, and his tutor, M. de Maucler, whose conversation was both agreeable and instructive. On Sundays they attended Divine Service in the Church of Saint Martin, the only one in the neighbourhood where the French language was in use.

Lanele had taken up portrait-painting, and was considered fairly successful. She also made studies with the peasants for models. She painted Princess Dorothea, and the likeness was so good that it was sent to Berlin as a present to Prince Louis. Dorothea also learnt drawing and water-colours under the direction of M. Warner, a very good

[1] An instrument with a keyboard and strings, which was replaced by the modern piano.

master, who used to come to Montbéliard to give her lessons ; but her favourite study was History and Literature.

The Duchess of Wurtemberg, on leaving Prussia after her visit to her uncle was over, stopped at Darmstadt on her return journey. She arrived there in great state in a carriage drawn by four horses, here she was joined by her husband, and they stayed for a fortnight.

The real reason of the visit, which appeared later, was, that a marriage had been proposed between the heir of Darmstadt and Princess Dorothea. Countess Henriette had been unable to remain at Montbéliard, as she had been called upon to accompany her father to Strasburg. When the Duke and Duchess returned home, Dorothea wrote Henriette the following letter:

My dear mother had the kindness to give me, on my birthday, a dress of Tours silk—it had a white ground with hand-painted flowers, and was embroidered with spangles, also a hat and ribbons and a cup of Berlin china with her monogram on it. You know how miserable I was in the absence of my parents, and so you can imagine my delight when they returned home unexpectedly on the 19th. We were sitting at table and just talking about them, when the door opened, and dear papa walked in. I gave a scream of delight, and threw myself into his arms. Ah ! dear friend, a moment of joy like that can be felt, but not described !

These letters between the Princess and her

friend passed almost daily. Nothing was too small or too trivial to describe. She used to write to Henriette, who spent the whole winter with her father at Strasburg, to do her commissions for her. The list comprised numerous things for the household at Étupes. She asked for pheasants, chickens, and ducks, dwarf trees, pots of flowers, blue and white pottery, also for Danish kid gloves, which were much in fashion just then. She wrote long accounts of the gay doings at Montbéliard during the winter, the tedium of which had been relieved by dances and theatricals.

CHAPTER II

AS the spring advanced the young Princes used to spend their days at Étupes, where they worked in the gardens, and earned their supper by the sweat of their brows, for they used to return quite tired out after a long day of real labour.

In the evening M. de Maucler read aloud a number of old letters which had been found at Montbéliard. Dorothea used to say she would willingly give up balls and other pleasures, for the sake of hearing these letters read. They were from her great-great-grandfather, Jean-George de Dessau, to his daughter the Margravine Philippe, grandmother of the Princess of Montbéliard.

Lanele was not with the family during the spring as usual, for she had gone to spend a week with the Abbess of Ollmarsheim. This lady was a friend of her father. Lanele being a Canoness, it was usual for her to spend a short period in a convent. Not that the seclusion was very strict, for in company of a band of other young Canonesses, who all bore the title of baronne, she passed a pleasant time in cheerful frivolities.

Her visit of a week was spent in laughing and talking and dancing, for a great deal of company came to the Abbey. The girls delighted in discussing the fashions, and asked Mdlle. de Waldner many questions about her clothes and what was mostly worn.

Feathers were in vogue, piled high up on the head, a mode which only suited tall women, the short ones looked as though their chins were halfway down their persons. The favourite colours were "Cheveux de la Reine," a sort ot ashen grey, resembling the Queen's hair, and a shade of violet, which Her Majesty was very fond of. It was of a deep brownish tint, and the King called it "Puce," because it was the colour of a flea. The name has stuck to it to this day. The Abbess was very kind, though no longer young, she was lively, and could enter into the enjoyments of others. She used to joke with the young ladies over these *serious* matters that they discussed with so much interest.

It was during her constant visits to Strasburg that Henriette de Waldner met and became engaged to the Baron d'Oberkirch. He was the head of his branch of the family, had served with distinction with his regiment Royal-Deux-Ponts, and had received the Cross of Merit. He was besides, a Protestant, so the marriage was considered in every way suitable. He was much her

senior, being forty years of age, and had no pretensions to good looks. But though short of stature, he had a good figure and distinguished manners, and was always quoted as being very elegant and a leader of the *ton* in Strasburg.

Dorothea was naturally much excited when the news of this engagement reached her, and awaited anxiously the first visit of her dear Lanele, who was to come in person to announce her betrothal to the Duke and Duchess. They greeted her warmly, and presented her with a diamond brooch and aigrette. But most welcome of all gifts to Lanele was a bracelet with the portrait of Dorothea set in brilliants, which the Princess fastened on the arm of her friend. During this visit the young girls exchanged mutual confidences, and Dorothea informed Lanele of what had taken place as regarded the Prince of Darmstadt, and her feelings on the subject.

The year before he had asked her in marriage; she had received his advances with indifference, though she was touched by his attentions, and with some hesitation agreed to the alliance. An understanding between the two Courts was the result, and the marriage was likely to take place soon after that of Countess Henriette. None of the family from Montbéliard were present at Henriette's wedding, which took place at Strasburg, and was a very smart affair. They were married according to

the rites of the Reformed Church, and after the ceremony repaired to the Hôtel d'Oberkirch, where the young couple were to reside with the Dowager, who received her daughter-in-law most kindly.

Some months after the Baronne d'Oberkirch was settled in her new home, she received a letter from Dorothea, requesting her to come at once to Montbéliard, for she was shortly leaving for Berlin, and had something of the greatest importance to tell her friend.

"Ah!" exclaimed the young Baronne, "Princess Dorothea is going to be married, but not to the Prince of Darmstadt. Who can it be? But whoever it is, we are bound to lose her altogether," and she shed tears at the thought.

M. d'Oberkirch did not like to accompany his wife, for they thought it was not the moment to intrude on the family, to whom he had not yet been presented. They were loth to be parted so soon, however he would not put any obstacle in the way, and she started off without loss of time.

On her arrival she found the little Court of Montbéliard in a state of the wildest excitement, for a marriage was in prospect beyond all their dreams and desires, the highest alliance in Europe after that of the throne of France. The suitor was none other than the Grand-Duke Paul, heir to the throne of Russia. This Prince was the only son of Catherine II., then reigning as Empress of Russia,

her husband, Peter III., having been made to abdicate in her favour.

When Paul Petrowitz was born on October 1st, 1754, Catherine had been married ten years without having a child. The union between her and the half-imbecile Grand-Duke, afterwards Peter III., was an ill-assorted one, and even in those early days the number of her lovers was notorious. Grave doubts were raised as to the paternity of the child, and Peter declared in a Ukase that he did not admit that Paul was his son; but his aunt, the Empress Elizabeth, at that time the reigning Sovereign, was fully alive to the necessity of an heir, and would not allow any difficulties to be made. As soon as the infant was baptized, which was done immediately, she carried it off in triumph, leaving the luckless mother absolutely alone, without even the necessary care due to her situation. But Catherine's hour of success was yet to come. Her ambitious mind, already casting into the future, cared little for the present neglect and indignities. She saw herself some day ruling the vast empire by reason of this very child. Catherine had little sentiment of family affection, she paid but little attention to her son during his childhood, caressing him when it suited her, but always more intent on her own interests, and she handed over the care and education of Paul to Count Panin.

With such a mother it is hardly surprising that the young Grand-Duke grew up moody and morose, and that the faults which he inherited should become more and more pronounced. In 1764, when he was only ten years old, a letter written from some one in St. Petersburg to the Duke de Praslin gives the following account of the little Prince:

The Grand-Duke shows signs of a disposition both sinister and dangerous. It is well known that his mother does not care for him, and she refuses him all marks of tenderness and love. He asked one of his suite the other day why his father had been allowed to die, and why his mother had mounted the throne that was his by rights. He added that when he was grown up he would insist on learning the truth about this matter. This child gives vent so often to these sentiments, that there can be little doubt that they are repeated to the Empress.

When Catherine considered it was advisable that her son should marry, she made up a match, without consulting his wishes, with a Princess of Darmstadt. Paul appears to have been fond of his young wife, though it was said she was unfaithful to him from the beginning.

Prince Henry of Prussia, brother of Frederick the Great and uncle of the Duchess of Wurtemberg, had been sent to the Court of Catherine II. by his brother to inquire into the affairs connected with Poland, and to avert a war between Prussia,

Austria, and Russia. This negotiation proved most successful. Prince Henry, finding himself unable to cope with the covetous designs of Russia and Austria as regarded Poland, insisted that Prussia should take its part, and thus preserve the balance in the negotiations concerning that unhappy country. On his return, Frederick said to him, "God inspired you, my brother, you have indeed acted with wisdom." Prince Henry obtained a wonderful ascendency over Catherine.

He was again on a visit to her in 1776, and during that time the wife of the Grand-Duke Paul died in giving birth to a dead child. The despair of the Empress was extreme, not from excess of affection, but from thwarted ambition. Her excitable nature could not brook any of her schemes being upset. She retired to Tzarskoe-Selo with her son, who was naturally in a state of grief, and there Prince Henry joined them, doing his best to assuage their sorrow.

After the first violence of Paul's grief was over, it became necessary to consider the Imperial interests, and a second marriage was discussed. The idea then occurred to Prince Henry to bring about an alliance between his great-niece, Dorothea of Wurtemberg, and the Grand-Duke. This would also strengthen the bond between Prussia and Russia. His influence over Catherine was such that she soon agreed to his proposal, but

a difficulty arose, Dorothea being at the time actually engaged to the heir of Darmstadt. How could this be broken off?

Prince Henry considered that the wishes of the great Frederick would be sufficient to release her from her promise. A messenger was therefore sent by him to his august brother to tell him of the intentions of the Czarina, and begging him to put matters right.

The Prince of Darmstadt happened to be at that moment at Potsdam, and the King, with his infinite tact, prevailed on the young Prince himself to give up all idea of the marriage, in spite of his admiration for his affianced bride. And this was done in a manner that in no way hurt his pride or wounded his feelings. A messenger was then despatched to Montbéliard to arrange matters with the Duke and Duchess.

Once started, the affair was speedily settled. Favourable answers were sent to Russia, and it was decided that the meeting between the Grand-Duke Paul and the Princess Dorothea should take place in Berlin, and if they were mutually satisfied with each other, the wedding should be celebrated in St. Petersburg. The Grand-Duke, therefore, left for Berlin in company with Prince Henry, in order that if the betrothal did take place, he might receive his bride from the hands of Frederick.

It was at this crisis, when the Princess was on the point of starting for Berlin with her father, that the Baronne d'Oberkirch arrived at Étupes. Dorothea threw herself into the arms of her friend as she greeted her on the steps of the Castle, exclaiming,

"Lanele, I am the happiest Princess in the universe, though I am full of distress at having to leave you all."

The Duchess of Wurtemberg was less joyful than her daughter. She shed tears when alone with Madame d'Oberkirch, and deplored the coming separation.

"My mind misgives me," she sobbed. "All sorts of disasters happen to the Czars of Russia. Who can tell what fate is in store for my poor daughter?"

Youth and ignorance are proof against fears. At least, they have the wisdom not to seek them half-way; so the mother would not waken any doubt or uneasiness in the heart of her child, and kept a brave countenance in her presence. Dorothea, like the child that she was, amused herself with her favourite companion in rehearsing Court ceremonies, and bowing to empty armchairs, with a view of acquiring gracious manners.

"I am afraid of Catherine," she used to say; "I know I shall be timid with her, and she will think me a little fool. I shall be well satisfied if

I can succeed in pleasing her as well as the Grand-Duke."

Dorothea was now just seventeen, tall and lovely, with delicate, regular features, a noble air, and imposing carriage. She seemed born to wear a diadem and adorn a throne.

In spite of her childish pleasure in the coming wedding, as the last days drew near, the thought of leaving her home and her brothers and sisters was almost too much for her. At the end she clung to her mother, and gentle force had to be employed, and she was carried half-fainting to the carriage which was to convey her and the Duke her father and her two waiting-women. Madame d'Oberkirch remained supporting the mother, who was left weeping as her idolised child was borne rapidly away.

The Princess wrote daily letters to her mother, enclosing notes to her friend, one of which from Berlin, dated July 26th, 1776, gives in her own words her first impression of her future husband :

Darling Lanele,

I am happy, and more than happy, dearest friend, I could not be more so. The Grand-Duke is as amiable as it is possible to be, and he appears to unite in his person and disposition, every good quality. He arrived on the 21st, and on the 22nd Prince Henry made the formal announcement, and I at once took precedence of all the Princesses. I think I may flatter myself that my intended is much in love with me, which

makes me very happy. The messenger is starting for Stuttgard, so I can write no more. Adieu, dear friend. I am in heart and soul your devoted and loving

DOROTHEA.

Before marrying the heir to the throne of Russia, Princess Dorothea was obliged to embrace the religion of the Greek Church. Necessities of State are often hard and cruel on individuals, and it is one of the penalties attendant on royalties that their affections and feelings must give way before political interests. She had not, however, to abjure her religion, as by a curious arrangement of Duke Frederic-Eugene, whereas his sons were brought up as Lutherans, his daughters, though instructed in religion, were members of no Church. This was done with a view to their future marriages, so that they might adopt that of their husbands. All the same, it was a grief to her mother and friend, and Madame d'Oberkirch writes in her diary on this subject:

Surely God will call her to Himself at the end of her beautiful life, though she has to make the sign of the cross and worship images. But He sees the heart.

The Grand-Duke Paul found Princess Dorothea greatly to his taste, and confided his feelings to Prince Henry. The betrothal was celebrated with great magnificence, and was the talk of all Europe;

but the little Princess's loving heart could not be content without her mother's presence.

Expense they could ill afford had been the sole reason of the Duchess of Wurtemberg having remained at home. The Czarina having heard of this, placed forty thousand crowns at her disposal, and there being no longer any obstacle, the Duchess started off at once, accompanied by her ladies-in-waiting, and arrived in time for the ceremony.

King Frederick gave a magnificent banquet at Charlottenburg in honour of his great-niece, and there were balls and reviews at Sans Souci and Potsdam. Prince Ferdinand of Prussia organised a beautiful *fête* at Friedrichsfeld, and Prince Henry gave the bride-elect and her parents a brilliant reception at his Castle of Rhemsberg, where they stayed for four days.

Paul was very anxious to fix the date of the final ceremony, and when the time came for the departure to Russia, it was thought best that he and his suite, which was a very numerous one, should precede the bride, who with her parents would follow the next day.

It was a great disappointment to Dorothea that the state of Lanele's health had prevented her being present at all these festivities, and before leaving Berlin she sent her one last loving word of farewell:

August 18th, 1776.

DEAREST LANELE,

I have only just two minutes to spare, and I bestow them on you, to tell you we are all well, and all send you our fondest love—more particularly from myself, who am always your tender and faithful friend,

DOROTHEA

This was the last letter signed with that name.

At Memel, a fortress in Lithuania, the frontier of Polish Russia, they were met by the persons appointed by the Empress to form the Grand-Duchess's Court. On September 11th the travellers reached Tzarskoe-Selo. At the great entrance of the Palace Catherine and her son awaited their arrival. Paul came forward, and lifted his bride from the carriage, and presented her to his mother.

Of her feelings on this occasion Dorothea has left no record. Doubtless she was too overwhelmed with one ceremony after another to keep any very vivid remembrance of any of them.

The marriage was celebrated October $\frac{1st,}{13th,}$ 1776,[1] and Dorothea, or, rather, Marie Feodorowna, as she was henceforth called, became Grand-Duchess of Russia. Many of the letters which she wrote at this period have been preserved, and show how

[1] The Russians always used the Julian Calendar, which differs from the Gregorian one, and their year begins on January 13th. The rest of Europe also used this Calendar till 1700, when all except the Russians abandoned it.

joyfully she had begun her new life without fears or misgivings, and with, fortunately for her, no presentiments of the dark shadows which were to cloud her life later on. She was girlishly and frankly happy, and her new subjects were ready to worship her, as had been the case with the people of Montbéliard.

My dear and much-loved friend (she writes two months after her marriage), I have just received your letter from Strasburg, and envy you in that you will return shortly to Étupes, a happiness that is not in store for me. The Grand-Duke is a most adorable husband, and sends you many compliments. I am glad you have never met him, for you could not fail to fall in love with him and adore him, and I should be jealous. My dear husband is a perfect angel, and I love him to distraction.

MARIE FEODOROWNA,
Grand-Duchess of Russia,
née Princess of Wurtemberg.

With such a companion and such love, Paul's character expanded in an atmosphere of happiness such as he had never known before. The rather gloomy and morose young man, who had led such a loveless existence from his childhood, now found himself in a home such as he had never dreamed of before, and he gave to his young wife in those early days all the love and devotion which she returned to him so fully.

CHAPTER III

THE Grand-Duke, after his marriage, lived principally at Gatschina. Out of the many palaces they inhabited by turns, this was the one that pleased Marie Feodorowna best of all, not on account of its superior merit or beauty, but probably because she was able to make it more particularly her own. Here she soon surrounded herself with occupations, and as she loved art was always anxious to encourage and protect artists. Both she and Paul were devoted to music, and Madame d'Oberkirch used to send them any new compositions she thought would please them. A letter of thanks from the Grand-Duke on one occasion has been preserved.

Madame,

I am extremely obliged to you for the music which you were good enough to send me. I have not yet heard it played, but am convinced it will be quite to my liking, knowing the good taste of her who selected it. Besides which, Madame, you have a powerful title to my regard, that of being the friend of her who is the source of all my happiness. With such a title, you may be

sure that all you do will give me pleasure. Permit me to sign myself,

Yours faithfully,

PAUL.

On January 23rd, 1777, the Baronne d'Oberkirch gave birth to a daughter. The Grand-Duchess was much excited at this joyful news. The infant was named Marie Dorothea, and she was sponsor for it. On this happy occasion she wrote:

My joy was great, dear Lanele, at getting your letter, and hearing that you had been safely confined of a daughter, and that Divine Providence watched over you and brought you through your trial in safety. I kiss my little god-daughter with all tenderness, and feel a love for her I cannot express. My husband sends you his congratulations. I must tell you, to amuse you, that the Grand-Duke, hearing me speak so often of my dearest friend, has christened you in fun "Madame Zuckerbäcker," and when the post comes in he always asks me if I have news of Madame Zuckerbäcker! I do not know what I would give for you to know him; he is the very pearl of husbands. God be thanked. I am happy—happy beyond words. I keep repeating this to you, dear Lanele; but I know your love for me, so this will make you happy also.

MARIE DE RUSSIE.

In another of her letters she writes:

The Grand-Duke came into my room, and asked me to whom I was writing. "To Lanele," I replied. Upon which he took the pen from my hand and wrote you the following words; and as I

knew they would give you pleasure, I allowed him the use of my pen.

In the Grand-Duke's handwriting at the bottom of the page were these words,

My wife's affection for you, Madame, makes me desirous to recall myself to you, and beg you to believe that the warm feelings she entertains towards you are shared by myself, and my great desire is some day to be able to prove this to you.

Yours, with affection,

Paul.

Their first child was born December 20th, 1777. Great was the joy of the family and the nation when it proved to be a boy, he was given the name of Alexander Paulowitz. The Grand-Duchess was very ill on this occasion, and when, the following year, it was known that she was again to become a mother, great anxiety was felt on her behalf. Lanele describes a visit she paid to the Princess de Montbéliard, who, not expecting her arrival, was seized with apprehension that she was the bearer of bad news, and Madame d'Oberkirch had some difficulty in reassuring her.

They both knew that Marie Feodorowna was in a very delicate state of health, but in May, 1779, the welcome intelligence arrived that she had safely given birth to a second son, who received the names of Constantine Paulowitz. The young couple were devoted to their children, and Marie

Feodorowna wrote with the greatest pride of them. The succession to the throne of Russia was now assured, but the young mother was not left long in peace to enjoy the care of her little ones. Their imperious grandmother at once began to take their bringing up and education into her own hands.

It was Catherine who taught "M. Alexandre," as the Grand-Duke's eldest child was called, his A B C, though he was a mere baby and could not speak plain.[1] She also occupied herself with his wardrobe, and certainly, judging from a letter of hers, she studied his comforts more than his appearance. She invented the costume herself.

All the things are sewn together (she wrote), and put on in one piece, and the garment is fastened behind with two or three hooks. There are no strings or bands, and the child is hardly aware when he is dressed. The nurses thrust in his arms and legs as they put the suit over his head, and there it is—finished.

Other royalties, it appeared, asked the Czarina for her pattern for their own nurseries.

Constantine was a sickly child, and, having been born at the time of what was called "The Greek Project," a Greek name was bestowed on him, and he was brought up by a Greek nurse.

"I would not give ten sous for him," said

[1] Catherine compiled the "Grandmother's A B C" and the "Alexander-Constantine Library" for the benefit of her grandsons.

Catherine one day, "and I don't think he will cumber the earth long." But though he did not receive the caresses bestowed on his brother, the frail child struggled on from infancy to boyhood, and in the end developed a splendid physique.

Alexander was very precocious, he was an affectionate child and a great favourite. He, at any rate, had no fear of his grandmother. One day when he was ill and shaking with ague he crept to her door wrapped in his little cloak.

"Who is there?" said the Empress.

"A sentinel dying of cold," answered the child.

Another time he asked his nurse,

"Who am I like?"

"Your mother," was the reply, "you have her mouth and nose."

"I do not mean my face. Who am I like in my ways and temper?"

"In that respect you resemble your grandmother more than any one else."

The little Prince jumped up and threw his arms round his nurse's neck.

"That is what I wanted to be told," he cried joyfully.

"That child will become a personage if the secondary members of the family do not interfere," said the Empress. This remark shows clearly what were her feelings towards Paul and his wife, and how completely she tried to rule them in all

matters, in politics, in the education of their children, and in everything.

During these first years of Marie Feodorowna's life in Russia, Madame d'Oberkirch kept up a voluminous correspondence with her. Nothing was too trivial or unimportant for these letters, for all news was welcome, and thus only could the Imperial exile, be kept in touch with what was going on in her old home. There were no other means of communication save letters in those days. Newspapers were not a source of gossip, nor did they retail private news, and there were few chances of seeing old friends, and none of meeting for the present.

So Lanele wrote pages, relating stories of all kinds that were of interest for the moment, and as some of them are descriptive of life at the latter end of the eighteenth century, and give details of well-known historical personages, it may be worth recalling a few of them in this Memoir. One of the anecdotes which the Baronne recorded at some length is curious, not for any value as an historical incident, but simply as a sensational romance, such as we are accustomed to find in fiction in the present day, and which no doubt, in the lack of such literature, must have interested the Grand-Duchess extremely.

In May, 1779, the public executioner of Colmar was arrested for having been absent without leave.

When brought before the magistrates he gave the following account of himself:

One evening at the end of April he was sitting at work alone in his house, his wife having gone out. He was mending some of the handcuffs and other implements of his profession, when he heard a knock at the door. He was surprised at any one coming to his house, as, owing to his odious calling, it was generally shunned and held in abhorrence, few save the officers of the law ever came near the accursed spot.

However, an executioner is not likely to be easily alarmed, so in spite of the lateness of the hour, he promptly opened the door. Three men wrapped in travelling cloaks stood on the threshold, and outside the gate at a little distance, a coach was waiting, surrounded by several persons. Not feeling the least afraid, but merely thinking they were travellers in difficulties, he invited them in, upon which, before he could defend himself, they had seized and gagged him, and he found himself being carried off in the coach, bound and helpless, and the horses were put to a gallop. After a time one of his captors addressed him in these words:

"Listen, my man, we do not mean to hurt you. We are merely taking you to accomplish an act of justice. Do not ask us any questions, for they will not be answered, all we want of you is that

you should perform the task required, for which you will receive one hundred louis."

The man breathed again on being assured that at least they did not seek his life, but he was still tortured by the gag. Presently the speaker continued:

"We are now going to loosen the cords and bandages, but if you make a sound or cry for help, you will be a dead man," and, suiting the action to the word, the cold muzzle of a pistol was placed on his chest.

As soon as they had released him and he was once more able to speak, he swore that he would obey his captor's orders and follow out their instructions. Whenever they halted to change horses his eyes were bandaged again, otherwise he was well treated and well fed, during the rest of the journey, which lasted two days. He had only a vague idea of the direction they had taken, but fancied they had crossed the Rhine and gone over a mountain pass.

It was night when they reached their destination. He heard the creaking of a portcullis being drawn up, and the hollow echo of a very deep moat as the carriage rumbled over a drawbridge. They turned into a courtyard, and, still carefully bandaged, he was lifted out of the coach and led up some steps. As he mounted them he heard the clang of muskets dropping into position after being shouldered.

When the bandages were at last removed from

his eyes, he found himself in a vast hall faintly lighted by torches, and a circle of men in the robes of judges sitting round the room. From the door opposite to that by which he had entered, a woman was brought in. She was tall and slender and quite young, and wore a robe like a nun's dress, only it was made of violet velvet. She stood erect in the centre with folded arms, and looked straight before her.

"We have sent for you," said one, who appeared to be the President of the assembly, speaking in German, which the executioner, like all Alsatians, could understand, "to execute a sentence on this woman, in order that, as her crime was committed in secret, so may her punishment be. You are called upon to fulfil your function and decapitate this person."

The executioner, in spite of his horrible calling, was an honest man. He did his work at Colmar in the interests of law and justice. This was a murder, and he answered firmly,

"I will not do this thing!"

A clanging of swords made itself heard in the hall, which led him to think that the legal robes were not as peaceful as they looked.

The condemned woman remained silent, as if indifferent to all around her.

"You promised to obey, if not, you must take the penalty."

"I am not an assassin, besides, you must tell me—What is this woman's crime?"

"Do you ask what she has done? When I tell you, your hair will stand erect with horror," cried the President.

"Enough!" said the lady, moved at last. "You may kill me if you like, but you have no right to reveal to a man like this what your ears discovered. If I am guilty, punish me, and I will submit to it, more I will not endure."

A silence ensued, broken only by the great clock which chimed the hour of eleven.

"There is not a moment to lose," said he who seemed to be the chief, and a large sharp-edged blade was handed to the executioner.

"I will not!" he cried vehemently. "Do the work yourselves."

"Listen! Do you value your life?"

"Yes, for the sake of my wife and child."

"Very well, then, choose. If, when the clock strikes a quarter past eleven, this women is not beheaded, you will die by this pistol I have in my hand."

"Why don't you despatch her yourself, as you have no scruples at being a murderer?" was the stern reply.

The President trembled with rage under his long robe.

"Make your choice!" he answered curtly.

Brave as he was, the executioner began at last to be afraid, though he did his utmost to conceal it. He prayed silently, and, being a Roman Catholic, invoked the aid of the Virgin and Saints. The result of this was that he again refused to do the work.

"You have still ten minutes left," replied the Judge coldly.

Again the solemn, icy silence reigned. The pendulum swung with a measured sound as the minutes slowly passed. The lady stood like a statue of stone. The blade was once more put in his hand, while the chief prepared his pistol. From force of habit the luckless man passed his thumb along the edge of the weapon.

"My God!" thought he, "why should I leavė a widow and an orphan?"

But he made yet one more appeal.

"Do you not allow her at least to have a priest?" he asked.

"Do your office," was the stern reply.

"I cannot unless the lady's hands are tied."

"Do you dare to bind my hands?" she cried, with ineffable pride, roused at last out of her apathy.

The only answer to this was, that two men advanced, and, seizing her, bound her to a block. A sort of giddiness came over the man, either from fear or love of life. He raised the weapon, and with unerring aim it descended on the white neck of the

victim, and severed it at one blow, and then, strong man as he was, and accustomed to bloodshed, he fell in a dead faint by the side of the murdered woman. When he came to himself, he was once more in the coach, with bandaged eyes, wrapped in a cloak which hid his stained garments, and a sum of money double what had been agreed upon was handed to him.

On the fourth day he was home again, only this time they deposited him in a field not far from his house. He found his wife in the deepest anxiety, and the magistrates, who were needing his services, were furious at his absence. His deposition was taken down, and most careful inquiries were made, but nothing was ever discovered.

"What I have written," concludes Lanele, "has been copied from the official papers, the General having kindly obtained a copy for me; and though the law officers at Colmar tried their best to find both the place of the murder and the name of the unfortunate victim, they never succeeded in doing so. We talk of nothing else just now, all Alsace is taken up with this story."

The following winter the Baron and Baronne d'Oberkirch went to reside in Strasburg, and she gives a graphic account in her letters of the enthronement of Prince Louis de Rohan, who succeeded to the See of his uncle the Cardinal Constantine, to whom he had been coadjutor.

The new Bishop was a very great seigneur indeed, and he used to say that the episcopal domains in France and in Germany were but as a ring on his finger. What a pastoral ring! His chapter, composed of twelve canons, and twelve more in residence, received him at the door of the Cathedral. He was born in 1734, and was still young and very handsome. "I have often met him," writes Lanele, "and I shall have occasion to speak of him later."

The home at Étupes had greatly changed since the departure of Marie Feodorowna. Her lively presence was greatly missed, for none of her sisters were as merry and laughing as she had been. She had been the life and soul of her home, and the Princess of Montbéliard could never reconcile herself to the loss of her eldest daughter.

Mdlle. Schilling was another real loss in the family circle, where she had always been an immense favourite. She had accompanied the Grand-Duchess to Russia, as lady-in-waiting, and in a measure took the place in the affections of Marie Feodorowna which had been held by Lanele; at least, she was her daily companion and confidante. She there married the Baron de Benckendorf.

A wedding took place that autumn in Alsace which was a source of much talk, and Mdlle. d'Oberkirch wrote an amusing account of it to the

Grand-Duchess. This was the marriage of the young Prince of Nassau-Saarbruck with Mdlle. de Montbarry. Great surprise was expressed at this match, not because he was a Protestant and she was a Roman Catholic, for mixed unions were very common in that country, but because of the youth of the bridegroom. He was only twelve years old, and the bride was eighteen. She was the daughter of a former Minister of War. It was, of course, a splendid alliance for her in point of position, and had been arranged by her ambitious parents. Verses of a most extravagant nature were written on the occasion, in which they extolled the bride, who was leaving the "tender hands of a loving mother, for the arms of a devoted husband," the *devoted husband* being a little boy of twelve, who cried from morning till night, and was furious at finding himself an object of curiosity. He fled from his future wife whenever he could, and behaved to her with great rudeness. In spite of this, the Prince his father was willing to celebrate this absurd marriage with great state. All the neighbouring Courts were bidden, and everything was done in magnificent style. For three days hunting-parties and other *fêtes* were held.

The Oberkirchs were among the guests, and found it very amusing, meeting a great many French and German acquaintances. The bridegroom would not dance with his wife. He was

threatened with a whipping, and then he was bribed with sugar-plums to go through a minuet with her. Every one was in fits of laughter. M. de Waldner, Lanele's brother, undertook to console the little Prince, and got a large picture-book with which to amuse him. Among others was a print representing a wedding procession. As soon as the boy heard the word wedding, he shut the page, and said, "Take it away, Monsieur. I hate a marriage, it bores me to death. I have quite enough of it here, and, look!" he added, pointing to a tall, ugly woman in the picture, "that is just like Mdlle. de Montbarry." This was indeed a promising beginning!

CHAPTER IV

MADAME D'OBERKIRCH obtained the permission of her husband to spend the summer of 1780 at Montbéliard, taking her little girl with her. The Princess adored the child, perhaps for the sake of its beloved godmother, and Lanele and her little Marie were ever made welcome. She stayed on for the marriage of Prince Frederic-William, the eldest son, with Princess Augusta of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel. He had served as a colonel with the Prussian army, and the match was one that pleased his parents greatly.

In the autumn they had a visit from the Abbé Raynal, who had just arrived from Geneva, where he had brought out a new edition of his "Histoire Philosophique des Indes":

As is always the case (writes Lanele to the Grand-Duchess), like all people whom I dislike, he did not fail to attach himself to me. He declared I had a sensible mind, and was capable of understanding. Seeing that I did not respond, he said:

"Are you not a philosopher, Madame la Baronne?"

"I have not that honour, M. l'Abbé."

"You are at least convinced of the absurdity of certain doctrines?"

"M. l'Abbé, do not let us enter into any discussion. I am a Protestant, thank God, and have nothing to do with the affairs of atheists."

"Ah! if you are a Protestant, there is nothing more to be said."

And he turned his back on me very rudely.

All sorts of celebrities were received at Montbéliard and very kindly treated, but Raynal was not a success. Madame Hendel, the housekeeper, disliked him so much that she said, "If I had only known beforehand what he was like, I would have given him a cotton pillow-case." It was her usual punishment for those who offended her. The Grand-Duchess wrote to Madame d'Oberkirch who was at Montbéliard the following letter:

My very Dear Friend Lanele,

Madame de Benckendorf, whom we both love, begs me to write this letter to you, and prays you to convey to her step-daughter the enclosed note, which contains two thousand roubles for her stepson. Once more she asks that this may be kept a secret from all at Montbéliard. My dear Tille supplicates me every day to accelerate the return of this boy. She is away from me just now. I hardly like to give advice in this matter. I tell her to act as her conscience dictates, and that, absent or present, I shall always love her dearly. Dear Lanele, I implore you to stay as long as you can with my darling mother. You know she looks upon you as the child of the

house, and your little Marie I am sure follows you everywhere. I kiss my god-daughter. My children and their father are my happiness, the only one that I find in the turmoil of existence here. Write soon, dear Lanele, and do not neglect me.

Your sincere friend,
MARIE.

Much as Madame d'Oberkirch would have liked to carry out her friend's injunctions to stay always at Montbéliard, she was obliged to return to her home for the winter. The position she held in Strasburg, necessitated her taking her place at the head of her husband's house. From there she continued sending lengthy accounts of all that she thought would most interest her beloved Marie.

When they had settled themselves at Strasburg, she found every one much excited over an adventurer, since become celebrated, who had taken up his abode in their midst, and who had already begun those juggleries which were afterwards to make his name famous. Their meeting with him occurred in the following manner,

Soon after their arrival, the Baron and Baronne d'Oberkirch went to pay their respects to the princely Bishop, who had just returned from a pastoral tour in his diocese on the other side of the Rhine. His Eminence the Cardinal de Rohan, fourth in succession of that family who had reigned over the See of Strasburg, had come to regard his

ecclesiastical heritage as if it were his own. He was a very handsome man, not very religiously minded, and much addicted to the society of women. He was full of wit, and of a most amiable disposition, but weak and credulous in the extreme —foibles which he expiated very dearly in the matter of the Queen's necklace.

His Eminence lived in an episcopal palace worthy of a sovereign. His establishment was immense, and maintained on almost fabulously extravagant lines. He had fourteen stewards and twenty-five footmen. This alone gives an idea of the style in which he lived.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon of the Eve of All Saints when the Oberkirchs arrived, and the Cardinal was just coming out of his chapel. He wore a cassock of crimson *moiré*, with a rochet of Pointe d'Angleterre lace of incalculable value. When he officiated at Versailles the lace he wore was of such richness and delicacy that one dared not touch it. His coat-of-arms was worked in medallions above the flowers, and it was estimated at more than a hundred thousand livres. That day he had on the least valuable of his rochets, that in Pointe d'Angleterre, at least, so his secretary, the Abbé Georgel, informed them.

The Cardinal carried in his hand an illuminated missal, a family relic of great antiquity and

beyond all price. He did not consider that printed books were worthy of being used by himself. He received his visitors with the gallantry and politeness of the great seigneur that he was, and inquired after the health of the Princess of Montbéliard and the Grand-Duchess Paul, asking after each of them as if it was the one topic of prime interest to him in the world. He related to them what he had done on his late tour, and the curious people and things that he had seen. He had visited Salzbach, where Maréchal Turenne was killed.

"The idea struck me," he said, "to raise a monument to that great man. I have therefore bought the field in which the fatal bullet struck him, and with him the fortunes of France, that I may build a pyramid there. It is to be twenty-five feet high and wreathed with laurels. I shall also build a small house for a custodian, who will be chosen from among the old soldiers of Turenne's regiment—an Alsatian for choice. What do you think of this project, Madame la Baronne?"

Both husband and wife assured His Eminence that it was very patriotic. While they were chatting they were interrupted by a servant throwing open the folding doors and announcing, "His Excellency the Count of Cagliostro."

Lanele writes that she was stupefied to see this adventurer arriving with such pomp to visit

the Bishop, and still more to find him received with every mark of attention. This man had been living in Alsace since September, and was the talk of the whole country, as he pretended to cure all sorts of diseases. As he would not accept any payment, but, on the contrary, distributed a great deal of money among the poor, people flocked to him in numbers, in spite of the many failures among his cures and the want of success of his remedies.

The manner in which people threw themselves at his head was incomprehensible. He was surrounded wherever he went, they hung on his slightest words and were sufficiently rewarded by a glance. Among the cases which he treated those who recovered were persons who had nothing really the matter with them, or on whose imagination he could work. The authorities had an eye on his movements, and of this he was well aware, but pretended to take no notice. He was said to be an Arab, but spoke French with an Italian or Piedmontese accent. In reality he was a Neapolitan. To fill the vulgar mind with amazement he affected eccentricities, and among other things always slept in an armchair instead of going to bed, and ate nothing but cheese.

Cagliostro was not exactly handsome, but he had a very remarkable physiognomy and a wonderful

expression in his eyes. They had a depth that was almost supernatural, cold and yet piercing. He attracted and he repelled, he inspired fear and curiosity, he was at the same time both ice and flame. He wore matchless diamonds in his shirt front and on his watch-chain, and had rings worth a king's ransom—unless indeed they were only paste. He pretended to manufacture them himself, in fact, everything he said and did pointed to charlatanism.

As soon as the Cardinal saw him, he rushed forward to meet him, and whispered some words in his ear. Madame d'Oberkirch, who had got up hastily sat down again, so as not to seem to show any attention to this impostor. Nothing daunted, Cagliostro was shortly engaged in conversation with the Baron d'Oberkirch, who received his advances very coldly. All the time the Count never ceased looking at Lanele, who, in writing to her friend, said she felt as if his burning glance was penetrating her bosom. All at once he turned towards her and said abruptly,

"Madame, you have lost your mother, indeed, you were so young at the time you hardly remember her. You are the only daughter of your house, and have a little girl of your own, and you will never have another child."

The Baronne remained aghast at this audacity, and vouchsafed no reply.

"Answer him, Madame," said the Cardinal with a supplicating air.

"Monseigneur," interposed the Baron, "Madame d'Oberkirch is not in the habit of speaking to people with whom she is not acquainted." He rose and bowed as he spoke, and so did his wife.

The Cardinal, accustomed as he was to subserviency, seemed embarrassed, but, turning to M. d'Oberkirch, said in his most polite manner,

"M. de Cagliostro is a learned man, and must not be treated as an ordinary individual. Stay a few moments, my dear Baron, and allow Madame d'Oberkirch to answer him. There is nothing wrong or unbecoming in her doing so, and have I not plenteous absolutions to bestow on you if there were?"

"I have not the honour of belonging to your flock, Monseigneur," replied M. d'Oberkirch, not best pleased.

"I know it only too well, Monsieur, and it grieves me, for you would be an honour to our Church. Baronne, at least tell us if M. de Cagliostro has made a mistake. Do, I beg of you."

"He has not made a mistake as far as regards the past," replied Lanele, unable to resist his persistency.

"And I am not mistaken as regards the future," continued the seer in a deep metallic voice that sounded like a muffled trumpet.

Lanele confided to the Grand-Duchess that in her inmost heart she sorely desired to consult this man, but, knowing her husband's dislike to any such mummery, dared not do so.

As to His Eminence, he remained staring, literally with his mouth open, drinking in the words, and evidently completely under the spell of this clever juggler. After events proved this clearly. Indeed, this man had a magnetic influence which few could resist.

Cagliostro had predicted with arrogant assurance the very hour when the Empress Maria-Teresa of Austria would die. The Prince de Rohan confided this to his guests that evening. The news of the event at the time named arrived five days later.

The death of this great Empress was an immense loss, and had she lived the state of affairs in France would have followed a different course. She and Catherine II., the Semiramis of the North, as she was called, had no equals in that century, unless it were Frederick the Great. Maria-Teresa died with heroic courage, giving her son Joseph II. advice and counsels to the end.[1]

Naturally, Cagliostro's prediction coming true,

[1] The following verse was inscribed under the portrait of Maria Teresa :

Cette merveille de notre age
A, de son sexe, la beauté
Du notre elle a tout le courage,
Elle a des dieux, la majesté.

increased his fame among his followers, and puzzled those who were not inclined to be his adherents.

Some days after, the Baron and Baronne d'Oberkirch received a polite invitation to dine with the Cardinal de Rohan.

"I am convinced," said the Baron, "that he wants to bring us face to face with that good-for-nothing sorcerer. It seems he has returned from Paris, where he had gone for a few days, and causes a perfect furore here, even among women of quality, which is worst of all. They have followed him from the capital, and are living in attics and cellars. Anything is good enough as long as they can be near their master. He has cured an officer of Dragoons who had some imaginary complaint, and since then he is besieged by patients. I must say he does things in a regal manner, and is a regular *philanthropist*.[1]

They hesitated some time before answering the Cardinal's invitation. M. d'Oberkirch wished to refuse, but his wife was bent on seeing the *sorcerer* once more, and fear of being rude to His Eminence decided them at last to accept.

Lanele gives a graphic account of the evening.

They had been right in their conjectures, and Cagliostro was there. He bowed most respectfully to Madame d'Oberkirch, who wondered greatly why

[1] The word philanthropist had only just been invented by the Encyclopedists, and was rarely used as yet.

the Prince de Rohan was so anxious that the great man should subjugate her. There were about fifteen persons present, and the Prince devoted himself entirely to her. He placed her at his right hand, talked only with her, and tried in the gentlest manner possible, to impress her with his convictions. It seemed incredible that a Prince of the Holy Roman Church, and a de Rohan to boot, an honourable and intelligent man, could have lowered himself so completely as to become a mere tool of this sharper.

"Really, Madame la Baronne, you are very hard to convince," he said at last, "even what M. de Cagliostro told you has not persuaded you to trust in him. Well, I see I must tell you a secret," and he showed her a very fine stone he wore in a ring on his little finger, worth quite twenty thousand livres. "M. de Cagliostro made this himself, he created it out of nothing—I was there —I saw it myself—my eyes were fixed on the crucible. What do you think of that as a real scientific talent, Madame? Who can now say that he is imposing upon me? The jeweller and the engraver value this stone at twenty thousand livres, and you will at least admit that it must be a very extraordinary sharper who bestows such a gift as this. And this is not all," continued the Cardinal, pleased to see the stupefaction painted on the countenance of his hearer, "he makes gold

also. Before me, up in the attics of the palace, he produced five or six thousand livres. He is going to make me some more. I shall be the richest prince in Europe. These are not idle dreams, Madame, these are proofs. Then think of his prophecies which have come to pass, and his miraculous cures. There is no doubt he is the most marvellous man of the age. And so kind also. What alms he distributes! What good he does! He has never asked aught of me, or received anything from me."

"Oh! Monseigneur," cried Lanele, when at last she found voice to speak, "this man must require some very great sacrifice from you, some dangerous work to be accomplished. If I were in your place I would be on my guard, he may lead you far astray."

His Eminence looked at her with a pitying smile. But later these words must have recurred to him, when Cagliostro and his accomplice Madame de la Mothe, in the affair of the Queen's necklace, had ruined and disgraced the princely prelate. As the evening wore on, Madame d'Oberkirch began to discover the reason of Cagliostro's attention to herself.

He had learned that she was the intimate friend of the Grand-Duchess, and had persuaded the Cardinal to impress Madame d'Oberkirch with the marvels of his occult powers, in order that he

might, through her, approach Her Imperial Highness. The plan was not badly conceived; but fortunately for Marie Feodorowna her friend had sufficient will and strength of character to resist his advances. Not, as she frankly admitted, that they had altogether failed to convince her, for she was fain to allow that her convictions were crumbling away before his audacity. It indeed required all her strength not to fall under the dominion of this prince of charlatans, who possessed a power that was almost demoniacal. He fascinated the minds of his hearers, and overcame their scruples. No one could exactly explain the source of his great influence, it remained always a mystery.

The Cardinal de Rohan lost prodigious sums of money through his *disinterested* friend, but he remained for ever blind, and spoke of him to the end with tears in his eyes. This unfortunate prelate ruined his splendid position by the weakness of his character. He worked much evil by his folly, though in the end he expiated his faults very dearly. None the less, his conduct was culpable in the extreme.

CHAPTER V

IN 1780 the family at Montbéliard were filled with rejoicing, for the news arrived that their beloved daughter was coming to France.

Paul had received his august mother's permission to take a prolonged tour through some of the principal countries of Europe. The Grand-Duke and Duchess were to travel strictly incognito, but had Catherine realized how little this would be respected in Paris, and with what enthusiasm they would be received there it is doubtful whether she would ever have consented to this step being taken. Her jealous nature could not stand any homage being offered to her son. If Paul was near her, he was a cause of perpetual irritation and annoyance, but when he was away she equally dreaded his influence at the foreign Courts.

The young couple were impatient to start, they were to visit Poland, Austria, Italy, and France, travelling under the name of the Comte and Comtesse du Nord. The Grand-Duchess's letters at this period were filled with joyful anticipations. It was arranged that her parents and her dear

Lanele should meet them at Vienna, and that the latter should remain with the Court during their travels as an extra lady-in-waiting. It must have been a pang to Marie Feodorowna when the moment arrived for parting with her children, more especially as she knew that an influence adverse to their parents, would surround them more than ever.

To Paul, fretting under his mother's tyranny and jealous rule, the coming journey must have been a most welcome change. No cloud had as yet arisen between the young couple, and he was never so happy or so well satisfied, as when in the company of the wife he adored.

It was arranged that the Duke and Duchess of Wurtemberg should go by way of Stuttgard and Munich to Vienna, there to await the arrival of the Russian Court, and they begged Madame d'Oberkirch to accompany them in their carriage. As there was still plenty of time, they spent a week at Stuttgard with the reigning Duke, who received them with great pleasure, and they were *fêted* in every possible way. The thought that they were so soon to see their beloved Marie filled all their hearts with joy, and they entered into the amusements offered to them with great zest.

The evening before their departure for Munich, the Baronne d'Oberkirch, while playing picquet, began to feel very ill, and asked leave to retire.

The company present laughed at her a little for being so easily knocked up, and the Princess of Montbéliard said, "This is no time to fall ill!"

Lanele passed the night in a burning fever, getting rapidly worse, and the next day the doctor pronounced her malady to be the small-pox. Consternation prevailed. She was at once secluded, for fear of contagion, and the Duke and Duchess were reluctantly obliged to leave her behind and proceed to Vienna without her.

Poor Lanele relates how she cried like a child and kept repeating, "I shall never see the Grand-Duchess Marie." At first the intelligence that the Prince and Princess had left was kept from her. M. d'Oberkirch, who had accompanied them so far on their journey, remained with his wife, but she mainly owed her recovery to the devoted care of a friend named Mdlle. de Cramm. This lady, forgetting her own youth and beauty, and without fear of infection, hastened at once to the sick-room, and remained there night and day, nursing the patient till the crisis was over. By these means, and aided by great docility on the part of the Baronne, who implicitly followed the orders of her physicians she made a complete and fairly speedy recovery, and by the time that the Russian Court had reached the southern French frontier, she was sufficiently well to proceed to Paris, there to await their arrival.

During her illness a great event had taken place at Versailles, the Queen having given birth to a Dauphin. This had caused the most intense joy throughout the whole country. In every town rejoicings took place. The infant was baptized the day after its birth with great ceremony, the god-parents being the Emperor of Austria and the Princess of Piedmont, and he was held at the font by Monsieur the King's brother. The Cardinal Prince de Rohan, Grand-Almoner to the King, performed the service.

Every kind of extravagance was committed in honour of the event. Ladies wore golden images of the Dauphin set with diamonds, hanging round their necks as pendants.

The Queen, having lost a great deal of her hair during her illness, was obliged to have it dressed very simply at the back of her head. This childish fashion was instantly copied by her subjects, and the ladies of France wore their hair done in a similar manner. Everything that Marie Antoinette wore was promptly copied. Mdlle. Bertin, her dressmaker, a very consequential person, puffed up with importance, was besieged by great ladies desirous of being dressed in the same style as the Queen. But it was strictly forbidden for any fashion to be copied, till after Her Majesty had worn it in public.

The Grand-Duchess had instructed Madame

d'Oberkirch to order dresses for her from Mdlle. Bertin. The brocades and laces chosen were the talk of the town, and the smart women flocked to the showroom to see the gowns. When all the preparations were completed, Madame d'Oberkirch left for Fontainebleau to await the Comte and Comtesse du Nord. She wrote a graphic account of the meeting:

I passed a sleepless night waiting eagerly for the dawn of the day which was to bring to me once more the friend of my childhood. At last we heard the noise of wheels, and the cracking of whips, and the bells of the horses. I rushed out to the gate. The Grand-Duchess put her head out of the window and waved her handkerchief at sight of me, and as soon as the carriage stopped, the Grand-Duke jumped out and came towards me. He received me admirably, with a mixture of affability and kindness. My dear Princess simply loaded me with caresses. It was one of the happiest moments of my life, and my heart was beating violently with emotion. We remained for some moments in each other's arms. "My dearest Lanele," she kept repeating, "how glad I am to see your dear face again!" then, turning to her husband, she said, "This is my second self." The Grand-Duke kissed my hands, while I shed tears of joy. My dear Princess told me of her children—her little Alexander and Constantine, whom she adored, and of whom she had news every day. We told each other of our affairs, our family, and our husbands. I was so curious to hear about the great Catherine, and her daughter-in-law gave me every detail. We were interrupted constantly, compliments and visits were being showered upon

her, but, all the same, we managed during these first hours to unburden our hearts to each other, and by taking up things at the point where we had left them to fill up the gap in our lives; and when the first emotions were over, we were indulging in peals of laughter, the echo of our former childish merriment.

The Grand-Ducal party were magnificently lodged in Paris at the Russian Embassy, at the corner of the Rue Grammont. They were greeted with acclamations on their arrival, and the people shouted, "Long live the Comte and Comtesse du Nord!" every time they appeared on the balcony.

Paul was at that time twenty-eight years of age. He was not attractive-looking, short of stature, and with the irregular features of the Northern race; but on further inspection he showed so much intelligence, and his eyes were so bright and his smile so animated, his manners so dignified yet so easy, that he soon became exceedingly popular.

Marie Feodorowna had become exceedingly beautiful. She had grown since her marriage, and her figure had developed. She had a splendid carriage, and compared well with the French Queen for grace and elegance. They were accompanied by the Baron and Baronne de Benckendorf, the latter the "Tille" of the Princess's childhood, and still her devoted companion.

Prince Alexander Kourakin, who had been

Paul's comrade since his youth, and who accompanied him everywhere, was also in attendance. This young Prince was very good-looking, not at all in the style of the *barbarians of the North*, as the French called them. He was fond of society, and was much run after at Versailles. The Prince and Princess of Montbéliard did not accompany their daughter to Paris, they parted with her at Dijon, with much regret on both sides, though not without hopes of meeting soon again. The Grand-Duchess clung to the parents that she loved so dearly, and looked forward to revisiting the home of her childhood.

Marie Feodorowna was a very early riser. Lanele used to go to her room soon after six, and they would sit and chat together before the ceremonies and fatigues of the day. The fashionable hour for dinner was two o'clock, and Paul used to entertain his wife and her friend, all through that meal, with stories of what he had seen and done. He at once amused himself by going about incognito. He went early to Versailles, where he heard mass, sitting in the tribune without any ceremony whatever, and witnessed the procession of the Knights of the Blue Ribbon and the Order of the Saint-Esprit.

He visited the palace and gardens still in the character of a private individual, and returned full of admiration for the magnificence of Versailles,

the elegance of the apartments and dresses, and, above all, the beauty of the Queen.

In the afternoon Madame d'Oberkirch was directed to drive round Paris, and call upon all the Russian ladies of rank staying in the capital, especially those who bore the title of *dames à portraits*. This name was owing to a right they had to wear a portrait of the Empress set in diamonds hanging on the left of the corsage. This was, of course, a great distinction.

In the evening they again supped quietly together, the Grand-Duke relating his further experiences. He had already, with the shrewdness and sagacity which were essentially his characteristics, perceived the undercurrent of affairs.

After they had been given time to recover from the fatigues of the journey, their State reception at the French Court was fixed for May 20th. Marie Feodorowna wore a magnificent dress of brocade, bordered with pearls over a hoop six ells round. Her jewels were priceless. As they stood round her before starting, she kept repeating, "Shall I be as beautiful as the Queen?" Madame d'Oberkirch did not accompany her, as she did not belong officially to the Russian suite, and therefore could not present herself at Versailles, without a special invitation.

The King Louis XVI. was waiting to receive the Comte du Nord in the grand *salon*. He was

a timid man, always embarrassed by State ceremonies and ill at ease. Paul had far better manners, and exclaimed on seeing him, "How happy I am, Sire, to see your Majesty! it was the chief object of my journey to France. My mother, the Empress, envies me for having such a pleasure."

To this the King made no response except mumbling a few vague phrases. He then conducted his visitor to the apartments of the Dauphin. This first son died in infancy, and was spared the terrible fate that overtook his less fortunate brother.

The Grand-Duke admired the child greatly, and questioned the governess of the Royal infant, the Princess of Guéménée, as to his health and disposition. "Madame," he said, as he was leaving the room, "please remind M. le Dauphin, when he is older, of my visit, and call to his mind the friendship I feel towards him even now in his cradle, which, I trust, will be a token of an eternal alliance between our thrones."

These words were repeated to every one in Versailles, and the King and Queen were delighted. Meanwhile, the Grand-Duchess had been led by the Comtesse de Vergennes, wife of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the large drawing-room, where the Queen, surrounded by the Princesses of the Royal Family, received her Imperial guest.

Marie Antoinette had perfect manners, which made up for the want of them in her husband. She met the Grand-Duchess as if she had known her all her life, and did everything she could to be agreeable to her. She inquired into her tastes, and begged her to come often and see her, and expressed the pleasure she felt at this meeting. The royal ladies parted mutually delighted with each other, promising to meet again as soon as possible.

A State dinner took place the following evening. By this time Louis's shyness had worn off, and he received the Russian Court with more friendliness. The French Royal Family was a large one, including Mesdames the King's aunts and his brothers, the Comte de Provence, and the Comte d'Artois, and their wives. The latter were sisters. The Comtesse de Provence was not pretty, but had fine eyes, and her conversation was sprightly and witty, yet free from malice—no small recommendation at Court. The Comtesse d'Artois was small of stature, very simple and gentle. She had a fine complexion, but too long a nose for beauty.

At this dinner Marie Feodorowna shone by her conversation and cleverness, which were quite beyond her years. She bore herself admirably through the long and wearisome banquet, which was followed by an evening spent in presentations.

The castle was illuminated and the great ball-

room blazed with its million lights. Huge branched candlesticks with forty wax candles in each stood on consoles between every two windows. The orchestra was on a raised platform, and was a very fine one. It was a scene of splendour, of jewels and magnificent dresses and fair women, and the beautiful Queen shone pre-eminent among them all. A concert was held during the evening. M. Legros, of the Opera, and the celebrated Madame Mara sang some very fine pieces. Madame Mara came from Saxony, she was a handsome woman, with a musical talent full of warmth and energy.

It was three in the morning before they left Versailles. The poor Grand-Duchess, with a racking headache, lay back in the coach and slept during the long drive into Paris. They were, however, greatly pleased with their reception, and both wrote long descriptions the next day to the Czarina.

One *fête* succeeded another. Paris at that time was at the height of its glory and magnificence, and life was one long round of amusement.

After many nights spent in crowded assemblies and hot rooms, it was a relief to Marie Feodorowna when it was proposed to vary their pleasures by a visit to the Petit-Trianon. That lovely spot was in all the beauty and fresh bloom of May, the air

perfumed with lilacs, and the woods filled with the nightingales. The weather was lovely as they wandered round the enchanted gardens of this royal retreat, built by Louis XV., for the reception of his mistress, Madame du Barry, and from being the abode of vice, and the price of shame, became the centre of folly and extravagance, and the residence of the fairest and most unhappy Queen that ever reigned in Europe.

The air was balmy that spring, the butterflies flitted from flower to flower through the winding paths. Shady groves, fountains, and cascades of sparkling water adorned the grounds, laid out with consummate art. Who, then, could have imagined that this peaceful spot would be within sound of the most awful tragedies, and that queenly head would be one day not only humbled to the dust, but severed with ignominy amid the shouts of a furious rabble of her own subjects?

While the Grand-Duchess was the object of the attentions of the French Court, Lanele was loaded with invitations from the nobility of Paris, all being anxious to show every civility to the intimate friend of royalty. Therefore, on the evening of the State banquet, she accepted an invitation to the Opera, and afterwards to sup at the Princesse de Chimays. This lady had a little monkey, of which she was very fond. It was kept in a closet near her room, in company with a tiny long-haired

terrier. They lived in great harmony together, and only quarrelled over sweets or cakes. The monkey's chain having given way, he found himself loose, and enjoyed his liberty immensely. First he upset a basin of water, and then he went into his mistress's dressing-room, where there stood a beautiful lacquer box of toilet necessaries which was the daily object of his desire. He opened it, and spilt all the essences, rolled himself in the toilet powder, and, after looking at himself in the glass, began to smear his face with rouge. He then wrapped himself in a lace scarf, and all at once, while the party were at supper, he sprang into the room and rushed to his mistress. The ladies uttered shrieks and fled in all directions, they thought it was the devil in person, at the very least. The Princess herself hardly recognised her favourite, but when she had captured him, and assured the company it was indeed her Almanzor, their fears subsided, and they loaded the little creature with bonbons. Not that her friends were at all partial to the Princesse de Chimay's pet.

To please the Grand-Duchess the Queen gave a special audience to Madame d'Oberkirch. She received her most kindly, and took her in to see her children.

The little Princess, Madame Royale, asked her if she was German.

"No, Madame. I am French—an Alsatian."

"Ah! that is very much nicer," answered the child; "I should not want to love a foreigner."

Paul and his wife visited all the principal sights of the capital, and received addresses and gifts, in spite of their incognito, which was not always adhered to. They were taken to the prisons and to the Hôtel Dieu, and distributed alms wherever they went. They were also much interested in the churches, and compared Notre Dame to St. Peter's at Rome.

"The size and majesty and beauty of St. Peter's," said Marie Feodorowna, "overwhelms me. But it seems impossible to say prayers there, for this mighty temple is too lofty and too vast—God appears to be so far away. At Notre Dame, on the contrary, the sense of mystery, the dim light, and the noble architecture of centuries ago, when the power of religion was so much greater, inspire one with a sense of solemnity. Here I feel as if my prayers would be listened to, and that Divine love would be poured into my heart. That is my impression of these two great churches; but on the whole I prefer my Greek ones."

Marie Antoinette presented Marie Feodorowna with a magnificent fan set with diamonds. In the handle was inserted a pair of double glasses, which gave an excuse for the present, the Grand-Duchess being rather near-sighted. The Queen offered the gift with that taste and grace which were her special prerogatives.

"I know," she said to Marie Feodorowna, "that, like myself, you are short-sighted. Permit me to give you this fan, which may be a convenience to you, and which I trust you will keep as a souvenir of me."

"I will keep it all my life," answered the Grand-Duchess, "and it will give me the pleasure of being better able to see your Majesty."

The mornings of the Imperial couple were very fully occupied, as they visited private as well as public places. Accompanied always by the Baronne de Benckendorf and the Baronne d'Oberkirch, the Comtesse du Nord visited the Gobelins manufactory of tapestry, the "Invalides," the various churches and objects of interest, just as do the modern tourists to this day. One morning they stopped at the Thélusson's famous house in the Rue d'Artois. He was the great Geneva banker, the patron of Necker in his youth, and the real founder of his fortunes. It was one of the show places of Paris, the public being admitted by ticket. It was more bizarre than beautiful, though much of the detail was carried out with great taste. The staircase was superb, the entrance-hall was supported on handsome pillars. Already two millions of francs had been expended on it, and people asked how even with M. Thélusson's fortune he would ever be able to keep it up.

The Comtesse du Nord must have had a special

desire to see private houses, perhaps to judge how various ranks of persons lived in France, for she went over the house of a celebrated courtezan, Mademoiselle Dervieux, who lived near the Palais-Royal. It was on a small scale, enclosed in a garden, but was an absolute gem, and worth a king's ransom. Mademoiselle Dervieux had made her *début* at the Opera, and was still extremely beautiful. The luxury with which the fittings had been carried out was, of course, out of all proportion to the needs of the owner. Indeed, it was said to be more like a page out of the "Thousand and One Nights" than anything else. The garden was laid out *à l'Anglaise*, the fashion of the day.

The Palais-Royal had then the best collection of pictures in France, the private property of the Duc de Chartres. An old retainer showed the Comtesse du Nord and her ladies over the palace, which was full of art treasures as well. He had been born in the stables of the Regent, and had begun life as a jockey. He was very old, over eighty, but was a perfect storehouse of forgotten incidents, and told them stories connected with every room and every corridor. When he was offered money by command of the Grand-Duchess, he refused it proudly.

"Monseigneur pays his servants," said the old man, "and Laplace has eaten the bread of the

Orleans since his birth, and needs no other wages."

Shopping was naturally one of the occupations of the Imperial lady, and with Lanele she explored the principal establishments of Paris. Besides articles of dress, she bought a superb parure of enamel surrounded by marcassite.[1] It was a very curious ornament, and nearly as costly as precious stones. Another day she honoured a famous jeweller by the Pont Neuf, whose sign was the "Petit-Dunkerque," by visiting his shop. It was the most fashionable establishment of the kind, and all the newest ornaments were sold here at prices far beyond their worth. She bought the latest toy, which was a little gold windmill, to hang to her watch, and ordered a number of these little charms to take back to Russia.

The King desired that Marie Feodorowna should visit the royal library, as he had been much struck by her knowledge and taste in literature. Accompanied as usual by her faithful friend, who shared all her tastes, she drove there one morning, without any state, and spent some hours among the books with thorough enjoyment, though, as she said afterwards, it was only a superficial glance which the short time permitted her to take. Among other curiosities, they were shown two superb globes, the work of Père Coranelli, which had been

[1] A species of white jet much in vogue in France.

placed there. They had been since 1704 in one of the pavilions of the Château de Marly. They were the largest then existing, being twelve feet in diameter, while those at St. Petersburg were only eleven feet. The Grand-Duchess had a real taste for all that was scientific and literary. Her mother, the Princess de Montbéliard, had always disliked the frivolities and folly of French society, and would not allow her daughters to be brought up in that atmosphere, so from childhood Marie Feodorowna had had her taste cultivated and encouraged.

On her return from the library she insisted on Lanele remaining to dine with her and the Grand-Duke. Paul entertained the ladies during the meal with all that he had seen and done that morning. He had visited the tomb of Richelieu at Sorbonne, and one of the professors had done the honours, and showed him all the treasures of this learned and royal college.

"The Czar your illustrious ancestor, the immortal Peter the Great, visited this place, Monseigneur," said the Professor. "He knelt before the tomb of the famous Cardinal, and said, 'Oh, great man, if you were but still living, I would give you one half of my kingdom if you would teach me how to govern the remaining half.'"

"And what answer did you make?" asked his wife.

"This was my reply," Paul said, with a smile: 'Had I, Monsieur, been in the place of the Cardinal, and able to speak, I should have said that I feared the present the Emperor desired to give me was one that it might be difficult to retain for long.'"

This from the lips of Catherine II.'s son was a rather apposite remark.

CHAPTER VI

MARIE ANTOINETTE was devoted to the Opera, and it was owing to her influence and to the protection and encouragement she extended towards the singers, that France owes the immense change that took place in music, which then began to acquire importance in the eyes of the world.

The Chevalier Gluck had given her lessons, and in spite of the cabal formed against him, he was supported by the favour which she showed him on every occasion.

His rival was Piccini, and they each composed an opera called *Iphigénie en Tauride*. Paris became divided into Gluckists, and Piccinists. The quarrel over the two composers and their merits raged fiercely, and affected even private families. A well-known beauty and woman of fashion was heard to say, "How can I endure my husband, and how can he expect me to be faithful to him? He is a Piccinist, and dins it into my ears morning, noon, and night."

"I suppose you return it to him in praise of

Gluck from evening till morning?" was the friend's reply.

The principal actress in Piccini's company was Mademoiselle Laguerre, who arrived one evening on the scene in a state of intoxication. She was hissed off the stage, to the great indignation of her lover, the Duke de Bouillon, who was absolutely devoted to her, and had ruined himself on her account. The following verses were written on this occasion, and sung in the streets:

Bouillon est preux et vaillant
Il aime *la Guerre*
Son cœur la préfère;
Ma foi, vive un Chambellan
Qui toujours s'en va disant,
Moi j'aime *la Guerre* ô gue,
Moi j'aime *la Guerre.*

Au sortir de l'opera.
Voler à *la Guerre*,
De Bouillon (qui le croira?)
C'est le caractère;
Elle a pour lui des appas
Que pour d'autres elle n'a pas,
Enfin c'est *la Guerre* ô gue,
Enfin c'est *la Guerre.*

A Dufort il faut *du Thé*[1]
C'est sa fantaisie
Soubise moins degôuté,
Aime *la Prairie.*[1]

[1] Another actress of the day.

Mais Bouillon qui pour son roi,
Mettrait tout en désarroi,
Aime mieux *la Guerre* ô gue,
Aime mieux *la Guerre.*

This poor Duke was a most extravagant and foolish individual, among other absurdities he invented the order of "La Félicité," which he gave to young women whom he found willing to wear it, which they mostly did with alacrity. It consisted of a green ribbon from which was hung a small cross. He was anxious to persuade the Baronne d'Oberkirch to wear one, but she refused indignantly.

The new Opera House was a very fine one, and the royal party went there frequently. One evening, on returning from the theatre (which was over at a very much earlier hour than is the habit now), Monsieur de Beaumarchais appeared in the *salon* of the Comtesse du Nord, and offered to read to their Imperial Highnesses his new play, entitled *Le Mariage de Figaro*, which had not yet been made known to the public, it having been refused for the stage. As the Comte du Nord had already declined to give an audience to M. de la Harpe, he hesitated and said, "I don't wish to embroil the great Powers." But the Comtesse insisted, and the reading began.

The *Mariage de Figaro* interested them

greatly, though they pronounced it less good than his former work, the *Barbier de Seville*. This, however, is open to question, and when it finally appeared it called forth much criticism, both favourable and adverse.

Catherine II., who was a woman of literary taste, in writing of this play, gave her opinion as follows:

> It imitates the ancient dramatists, and has not been purged of their defects. It is a tissue of intrigues without a scrap of reality. It is cold as ice, and has no pungency in the wit. I never found myself in worse company than when hearing that celebrated wedding.

M. de Beaumarchais was a very remarkable man. He was the son of a watchmaker, and rose entirely by his merits and courage. He triumphed over all obstacles, and made a great fortune. His enemies declared that he painted his own portrait in *Figaro*. If this was true, he also painted that of many others.

M. de la Harpe was not going to allow himself to be put aside at the Russian Court. He arrived the following evening to read aloud an epic poem in praise of the Comte du Nord. It was wanting in taste, and very much too long. It was full of praise and gross flattery of German poets, of whom he knew nothing, but hoped to gratify the Grand-Duchess, who was of German descent,

with these fulsome compliments. He compared the Grand-Duke to Peter the Great.

Paul, who was a man of great discrimination and good sense, was not pleased by this ill-judged incense. "My ambition," he said, "is to resemble him some day and continue the work which he began, but up to the present date I have no right to place my inglorious name on a level with his famous one."

Life in Paris was altogether different from the sort of existence Marie Feodorowna passed in Russia, and through the medium of her friend she was able to reach the inner life of the gay world and to hear interesting details of their families and affairs. Lanele paid all the necessary visits for her, and brought back all the news and gossip of the town.

The jargon of the inhabitants and the smartness (as we say now) of the true Parisian have always been remarkable, and in former times was almost unique. Madame d'Oberkirch used to say, "One is really obliged to keep in touch with them, unless we want to pass for mere ignorant country folk."

The Comtesse du Nord and she often laughed over these *little great things*, as they called them, which were considered of such account. All the same, it was necessary to conform to some of them, for does not fashion regulate even kings?

On May 30th they all attended very early in the morning a great service held in Notre Dame. It was an imposing spectacle, and the Archbishop M. Leclerc de Juigné officiated. The Imperial party were seated in the gallery. The music was especially fine, and the pomp of a Roman Catholic mass struck them as being very imposing.

The Comte and Comtesse du Nord that day, distributed a large sum of money among the foundlings and the poor. Their charity was inexhaustible, and few realised how much money they spent during their sojourn in Paris. No request was ever made to them in vain. They never went out without purses of gold, and returned with them empty. This was by desire of Catherine, and her children were only too pleased to obey her in this respect, and did not spare her privy purse.

Madame d'Oberkirch records in her journal of that day a piece of news which filled her with joy. She was told that the King had given an order, which was sanctioned by law, preventing the priests from altering declarations made by Protestants when registering the birth of their children.

Up till that time the curé had assumed the right of adding what he pleased to the statement, often throwing doubt on the legitimacy of the

children of Protestant parents, and though this amendment did not altogether ensure the validity of their marriages, it was at least a step towards furthering their position. The Grand-Duchess expressed her pleasure also. At the bottom of her heart she always loved the faith of her ancestors.

The various members of the Royal Family of France vied with each other in entertaining their Russian guests. The Comte d'Artois received them one morning at his charming house la Bagatelle, in the Bois-de-Boulogne, in those days a country residence. An orchestra of the best performers in Paris was in attendance, and a collation was served in the garden, the tables loaded with every delicacy of early forced fruit and vegetables.

M. d'Artois was a most amiable prince,[1] full of wit, not the least in the style of his brother, the Comte de Provence, who was learned and serious.[2] D'Artois had the true French spirit, his conversation was full of sallies and brilliant retorts. The Grand-Duchess was charmed with him. So-called impromptu verses were very fashionable at that epoch, and, just as they were leaving, a courtier wrote a few lines with a pencil and handed the paper to her. It was the usual exaggerated

[1] Afterwards Charles X.
[2] Afterwards Louis XVIII.

rhyme which met royalties and celebrities at every turn.

> Il suffit de vous approcher
> Couple auguste, pour vous connaître
> Si vous voulez tout à fait vous cacher
> Voilez donc les vertus, que vous faites paraître.

One afternoon Marie Feodorowna paid a visit to Madame Elisabeth the King's sister, a lady who was renowned for her charm of mind and person, and whose tragic ending has caused her name to be remembered with infinite pity.

At the conclusion of the visit, the Countess of Polignac, lady-in-waiting to the Princess, was ordered to conduct the Grand-Duchess to her carriage. As they proceeded down the corridor together, Marie Feodorowna spoke with admiration of Madame Elisabeth, and praised not only her grace and amiability, but her charming face.

"She has beauty, certainly," replied Madame de Polignac, "but her embonpoint spoils her appearance altogether."

This was not only in extreme bad taste on the part of one of her own ladies in the Royal Palace itself, but it was doubly rude, as the Grand-Duchess was also inclined to stoutness, though with her fine carriage it was less noticeable. She was consequently much offended, and, drawing herself up in a stately manner, replied drily,

"I admire Madame Elisabeth immensely. Madame, she could not be prettier, and I did not notice the defect you speak of."

A great fancy ball was being given in their honour at the Opera, and the Grand-Duchess was much interested choosing her costume. She was full of anticipation of really amusing herself at an entertainment of this nature.

"I am going to be myself till to-morrow morning," she said when the evening arrived.

"Do not count on it, Madame," said the Russian Ambassador, "you will not be more mistress of yourself there than elsewhere. I am answerable to the Czarina for your Imperial Highness's safety, and have ten spies always about you. The Queen of France is surrounded in the same manner, and the Minister in charge of the King's household is for ever watchful of the royal person."

"This is too much," cried the Grand-Duchess, laughing, "you want to take away all my pleasure, but I don't believe you."

She had ordered a superb domino in the form of a bat. It was left open in front to show her skirt, which was entirely covered with jet. But her hopes of amusement were doomed to disappointment. She never left her husband's arm except when she joined the Queen, and they were then escorted by M. Amelot, Minister of the Household. The

Princesses hardly left the royal box, and Marie Antoinette, while pretending to be in disguise, took care never to mix in the crowd without giving them every means of recognising her identity.

It was at this ball that the Duc de Chartres had an adventure with an unknown individual who wore a mask, and appeared walking inside a cardboard erection painted to represent a round tower. The Duke was talking to a woman, when the mask stopped and joined in the conversation. The Prince was indulging in his usual free and loose speech, and his most conceited manner, and he asked the man angrily what he meant by his freedom, and whether he did not recognise him.

"Monseigneur, I know you perfectly well. You always make yourself known by the style of your conversation."

This made the Duke furious.

"Arrest this insolent fellow!" he cried.

Some members of the suite hastened forward and opened the mock tower, only to find it empty, the man having slipped out on the other side. He was already lost in the crowd.

When Paul was told of this occurrence he said, "The King of France is a very patient man. If my mother had a cousin similar to the Duc de Chartres, he would not be allowed to remain in Russia, this rebellious and infamous conduct in a

member of the Royal Family leads to far graver consequences than people suppose."

These words were only too true, as future events proved.

The Duc de Penthièvre was one of those anxious to entertain the Comte and Comtesse du Nord, and he begged them to honour him with a visit at his Castle of Sceaux. This Prince was one of the best and most virtuous of men. He was the grandson of Louis XIV., and his only daughter was married to the Duc d'Chartres, afterwards Duc de Orleans. His son, the Prince de Lamballe, had died while quite a young man, and the Duke was still inconsolable at this loss. He was immensely rich, and his daughter was sole heiress to all his wealth. His daughter-in-law, the ill-fated Princess de Lamballe, being quite independent of him, having a large fortune of her own.

The marriage of Mdlle. de Penthièvre, brilliant as it was, was accomplished much against the wishes of her father. Certainly it was a splendid alliance, and the first Prince of the blood conferred a great honour on the daughter of a bastard race, but the Duc de Penthièvre desired no such glory. He knew too well the character of the Duc de Chartres. His mercenary motives were also very clear, for while the Prince de Lamballe was young and strong he refused even to entertain the idea, but when the repeated illnesses of the young heir

proved too truly that his life was in danger, the Duke came forward to press his suit. It was, however, the strong inclination of Mdlle. de Penthièvre towards him that clinched the affair. She saw the Duke once only, he gave her his hand to lead her to her carriage one day when she was leaving her own house. On returning to her convent, she declared she would marry no one else.

The next difficulty was to get the consent of the King. Whatever might be said against Louis XV., he had, at any rate, a good deal of judgment. He saw clearly what a powerful lever such an enormous fortune would be in the hands of his relative, and how it might be employed against the interests of the Crown. He refused at first, and the Duc de Choiseul, who had been asked to negotiate, had a good deal of trouble to persuade him.

"Just consider," said the King, "my own grandsons, the Comte d'Artois and the Comte de Provence, are far from having such wealth, and you will make the Dukes of Orleans much richer than the elder branch.

"Sire, the elder branch having the throne of France, there can be no comparison between them."

"Take care, Monsieur le Duc, that you do not give the cadets of the house the power to take it away from their seniors."

Louis further remonstrated with the Duc de Penthièvre himself.

"You are wrong, my cousin. The Duc de Chartres is a man of bad habits, and he has, besides, a bad nature. He is a libertine, and will not make your daughter happy."

However, Mdlle. de Penthièvre insisted on the match, and her father, who doted on her, could refuse her nothing. Both father and daughter must often have recalled the words of the old King.

The Duchesse de Chartres continued to adore her husband in spite of the many things related of his conduct towards her. His unfaithfulness was an open secret; but she was an angel of goodness, and forgave him time after time. Her fine eyes were often seen filled with tears, and a melancholy which nothing could remove settled on her. She smiled sometimes, but was never heard to laugh. Her children, whom she dearly loved, were not even allowed to be her solace, they were taken away from her, and placed entirely in the care of Madame de Genlis, who completely dominated the Duke.

On the occasion of the visit of the Russian Court, Sceaux was filled with all the best company from Paris, and a magnificent banquet was prepared. The Duchesse de Chartres, who had the most charming manners, acted as hostess. The Duc de

Penthièvre's house was a model one. An intimacy of the tenderest kind existed between the father and daughter; never a shade of discord marred the harmony between them. In spite of their great wealth, their habits were most simple. A serene contentment reigned within the walls. The Duke received the poor and lowly with as much heartiness as the rich, and greeted alike the prosperous and the unfortunate. He was beloved by all who knew him, and his daughter shared with him in the affections of their people. Only in the matter of her marriage had she ever disagreed with him, and even that failed to separate them—perhaps because of the father's infinite pity for the sorrows his daughter bore so nobly and without a murmur.

Madame de Montesson, the morganatic wife of the Duc d'Orleans, though not acknowledged at Court, was allowed to receive the Comte and Comtesse du Nord. In those days the ladies who had risen in royal favour held a perfectly unique place and position among the greatest in the land. It was said that the Duc d'Orleans, being unable to make her his duchess, turned himself into a M. de Montesson. He took up all her quarrels, her jealousies, and petty affairs. On this occasion, when a play was being performed before the Imperial party, she lost her temper altogether because several persons had the indiscretion to crowd into the front seats, and the Duc d'Orleans

turned them out very rudely to make room for the Grand-Duchess, who was quite distressed at being the involuntary cause of this unpleasantness.

When M. de Montesson died his widow desired to become Duchesse d'Orleans. The Duke assured her he would speak to the King and try to persuade him to give his consent. "Let us marry, old man, and we will see about the consent afterwards," was her reply. This they did, but the King remained obdurate.[1]

The Duc d'Orleans used to lament over this to everybody who would listen to him, for he was mad about her, and spent the whole of his fortune on her whims. Once he paid a visit to his daughter-in-law at seven o'clock in the morning, saying he had something very particular to ask her. This was that Madame de Montesson coveted immensely a diamond ornament which the Duchesse de Chartres always wore fastened on the bodice of her dress. She did not dare ask for it herself, but sent the old Prince on her errand.

"You will be the sweetest girl in the world," he said, "if you will give up this trinket. I will give you another far more beautiful and valuable. It would take too long to have this copied, besides, the Marquise wants it at once, and has not the patience to wait."

[1] Madame de Montesson had a fine house in the Rue Grange-Batelière, and wore the arms and liveries of the Orleans.

"And how about me, Monsieur? Am I to do without it all the time?"

'You can easily wear something else. You are not excitable and nervous as the Marquise is, nor have you accustomed yourself to yield to all your caprices. You will not refuse me I am sure, my dear. It will enable me to make her so happy."

Thereupon the Duchesse de Chartres, to whom it was a matter of no great consequence, agreed to his request, and handed over the jewel. She sincerely pitied the poor old man, who in his dotage was so consumed with passion, and ordered about as if he were an infatuated youth.

Of all the Châteaux which they visited, Marie Feodorowna preferred that of Chantilly, the property of the Prince de Condé. The gardens and woods were lovely, laid out with perfect taste, with ornamental sheets of water and fountains playing in shady groves. The very naïads reposing on their urns had about them the stately air of a Court, and the sculptures and statues were works of art.

The dinner with which they began their first day was at the modern hour of luncheon. They sat down a hundred and fifty persons, and were waited on by more than double the number of servants. The Princes of the house of Condé had always been lavish in their mode of living, which was on a magnificent scale.

The Prince de Condé was a man of much intelligence and good sense, and worthy of his ancestor the great Condé. He had married very young, his wife being a daughter of the Duc d'Orleans, and sister of the Duc de Chartres. She was little more than a child, and after the ceremony returned to her convent; but the young couple being desperately in love with each other decided on an elopement, which was doubtless made easy for them. Their eldest son, the Duc de Bourbon, was born before his father had completed his twentieth year. He was altogether opposed to the party of the philosophers who at that time took such a prominent position in French society, for he fully realised the harm they were doing, nor would he allow the habits and manners of the Palais-Royal to permeate his own household. His suite and that of his son were composed entirely of brave and loyal gentlemen of good family, while the followers and suite of the Palais-Royal were neither esteemed nor respected, and were indeed a byword on account of their scandalous behaviour. This struck the Comte du Nord very much, and he made some exceedingly just observations on the subject. The Comtesse du Nord, on her side, made comments on the admirable order which reigned in the castle. She had by no means found this to be the case elsewhere. The rooms were ready on arrival, there

was no hurry or confusion, visitors could go to bed and get up when they liked, and all felt as if they were in their own house. There is quite a modern tone about these observations; it is what we expect to find in every well-ordered household; but at that date it was by no means usual, and even the greatest people lived under a considerable amount of discomfort.

"Madame," said one of the Court ladies in answer to a remark of the Grand-Duchess, "hospitality such as that of the Condé family has ever been proverbial in France, and what better occasion could they have had to exhibit this quality of their race than during the visit of your Imperial Highness?"

The picture gallery was a great feature of the Castle of Chantilly, it was mostly filled with historical and battle pieces, all descriptive of the life of the great Condé. He still seemed to pervade his former home, and his descendants delighted in talking about him. Mademoiselle de Condé devoted herself specially to the visitors, and did the honours in a manner worthy of her ancestors. She was one of those fortunate few so immeasurably superior to her fellows that her rank had but little to say to it, in whatever class of life she had been born she would have risen above the rest. Her beauty was queenly, she seemed made to wear a crown, or the veil of an abbess. Yet

her manners were simple, and her tastes also, for the twenty-three years of her life had been mostly spent in the calm seclusion of a convent. Marie Feodorowna said afterwards that of all the Princesses of France none had pleased her so much as Mademoiselle de Condé.

The Duc d'Enghien, son of the Duc de Bourbon, was a charming child, the pride of his race, with a splendid position and fortune before him. What would have been the feelings of that gay assembly could they have foreseen the fate in store for him or witnessed his terrible end, when he was shot by order of Bonaparte under the ramparts of Vincennes.

There was a *bon-mot* going the round of Paris after this visit which was very appropriate. The King received the Comte du Nord as a friend! The Duc d'Orleans received him as a commoner! The Prince de Condé received him as a sovereign!

"That is absolutely true," said the Comte du Nord, when the saying was repeated to him; "it is impossible for me to speak highly enough of the House of Condé. No monarch in Europe could have received me better or in a more beautiful spot than Chantilly."

The visit lasted three days, the mornings were spent in stag-hunting, and theatrical entertainments filled up the evenings. The hosts and their guests had by now become very intimate, and after

dinner would sit chatting over the news from Paris or discussing their mutual friends. Of course, nothing but pleasant things were said of the Royal Family. Marie Antoinette had won the hearts of the Grand-Duke and his wife by her charm, and it was their opinion (not shared by the world in after years) that there was no one more fitted to guide and advise Louis XVI. than his beautiful wife.

Round the dinner-table they discussed also the notabilities of the world of fashion—the Maurepas, the Miromésnils, the Comtesse de Châlons, and the Duc de Coigny, also that arbitrary ruler and judge of the women of her time, whose wit and beauty and reputations were at her mercy—the old Maréchale de Luxembourg. It was she who gave the decision as to whose lapses might be forgiven and whose severely treated! Her *salon* was a regular tribunal from which there was no appeal. Her word was law. What she said was repeated and adhered to. She had been a Mademoiselle de Villeroy, and her first husband was the Duc de Boufflers. She was very notorious, and scandalous tales were current against her in the days of Louis XV. Her name was bandied about the town, but when she changed it on her second marriage, she seemed to imagine that every one would forget her past as easily as she did herself. She was not at all well educated,

but full of natural wit, and would assume a pedantic air, while in reality she was taking off and imitating her acquaintances. If a person displeased her in the veriest trifle, she would condemn him or her utterly, and no prayers or entreaties would induce her to take the offender back into favour. When Madame de Luxembourg issued a fiat against any lady, the unfortunate woman found it hard indeed ever to get invited into the inner circle.

All the most agreeable people and those most sought after were invited to suppers. Guests were divided into two sets, those asked to dinners and those to suppers. The dinner set consisted mostly of persons of a certain age, serious, dull, and tiresome, asked from obligation, not choice. It was easy enough to get invited to dinner in Paris, indeed, many people tried hard to shirk these dreary functions. But suppers were quite another affair. Those lacking in grace and elegance or knowledge of the world and amusing conversation might sigh in vain to be received into that charmed circle.

At the supper parties were gathered all the wit and beauty of Paris. There alone sparkling repartee was to be heard. Not much serious conversation took place, it was mostly froth, which evaporated as soon as the words were uttered, but all the same leaving an agreeable scent and

flavour behind it. Those who had once tasted of it found all other entertainments heavy and dull. The Comtesse du Nord was much struck by this feature of society, and mentioned it in her letters to Russia, saying that what she would miss most when leaving Paris would be these charming evening reunions.

CHAPTER VII

THE fashions in France during the latter part of the eighteenth century always tended towards the ridiculous. One of the headdresses composed by the celebrated coiffeur M. Leonard, just at this period is worth mentioning, if only to testify to the exaggerated ideas of the time. Ladies' heads were laden with every fanciful absurdity, which must have been singularly provocative of bad headaches.

This special headdress was worn by one of the ladies of the Grand-Duchess at a party at Versailles, and was the invention of the artist mentioned above, who in his constant search for what was novel degenerated into the ridiculous. Round this lady's head were placed a number of small flat bottles, each filled with water, in which were the stems of natural flowers wreathed in her hair. This idea was not always carried out successfully, but when it was, they used to declare that the effect of spring among the powdered locks was ravishing!

The ball at which this headdress was worn was a very magnificent affair. The Grand-Duchess

wore her set of chalcedony,[1] which was famous throughout Europe, Marie Antoinette was lost in admiration of it, and the Princesses kept coming up one by one to look at it. The crowds, curious to see the heir to the Russian throne, pressed round the spot where he stood talking to the King, who began to complain that they were being mobbed.

Paul at once moved away, and with that wonderful talent he possessed of saying the right thing at the right moment, said, "Sire, forgive me, I have become so completely French that, like your own subjects, I cannot keep away from the side of your Majesty."

These great Court functions were always over very early. On that occasion the royal party repaired for supper to the house of the Princess de Lamballe, sister-in-law of the Duchesse de Chartres, and dearest friend of the Queen. As soon as the meal was concluded they sat down to loto, the fashionable game of the period, now played by children only, but then it was the favourite form of gambling, and large sums were lost and won. Dancing commenced, in spite of the previous Court ball, and was far gayer than the State function had been. The King only showed himself at these small parties, and then retired, which at once relieved the assembly of all formality.

[1] A species of white agate.

Marie Antoinette loved such gatherings, of which she was the life and soul. The Russian Court did not leave Versailles till four in the morning, "Worn out with fatigue," writes Madame d'Oberkirch in her diary; but none the less they appeared the following afternoon at the great review on the Champs de Mars.

The previous day the Comte du Nord had visited the barracks occupied by the recruits. He had gone there on foot, accompanied by Prince Bariadinsky, and had spent the morning inspecting the men and questioning the cadets. He also went into the dining-hall and tasted their soup. A young man lent him his iron spoon. As the Grand-Duke was leaving, the Maréchal de Biron, who had received the Imperial visitor, handed back the spoon to the recruit, and said, "Young man, keep this metal spoon, and always remember that the Comte du Nord used it."

Paul had related this incident at dinner the day before, so the ladies were much interested by the review, and in seeing the fine regiment of the Gardes-Françaises on parade. They numbered three thousand picked men. The old Maréchal de Biron marched at their head. The crowd pressed round them, and rent the air with cheers, and vivas, and exhibited immense enthusiasm. The Grand-Duke and his wife were much amused. It was an unaccustomed sight to them, for a German or a

Russian crowd in no way resembled an excitable French multitude.

Marie Feodorowna's taste for seeing the houses of the French nobility must have been very great, for she continued visiting them till the last moment of her stay in Paris. She took a personal interest in things and people, and cared to learn something of their inner lives. Her faithful companion chronicled these visits, thus giving us an insight into much that is interesting now, as we compare their way of life with our own.

On June 10th the Comtesse du Nord, accompanied by Madame d'Oberkirch, so the diary of the latter records, inspected several mansions, which were renowned for the beauty and sumptuousness with which they were furnished. They passed hours examining the lovely things, "I, with such a bad headache," writes the Baronne, "that I cannot remember half of them."

They went first to the house of M. Beaujon, the Court banker, who lived with a luxury beyond that usually attributed to financiers, and far beyond the luxury to which princes attained.

M. Beaujon's house, which he called his hermitage, stood in the middle of a large garden laid out *à l'Anglaise*, and situated off the Champs Élysées, now the Palais de l'Élysée. It had belonged to Madame de Pompadour, and her brother sold it to Louis XV., and it was used for the keeping of the

Crown jewels. After that it came into the possession of the banker, who made it his home, but he sold it again shortly before the revolution. It was a real country house at the time when the Comtesse du Nord visited it. In the grounds were a dairy, a chapel, and a small menagerie of tame animals. The principal staircase was made of mahogany, and a dinner table to seat thirty persons was made of this wood, which was evidently considered a rarity. The statues and pictures were worthy of a palace, and the library was celebrated for the valuable books it contained. All the members of the Royal Family had given M. Beaujon their portraits, for what reason is unknown, unless it was for the pleasure of adorning the walls of these lovely drawing-rooms, where every detail was carried out with perfect taste.

This great financier's life was a very curious one. He was in bad health, and not allowed to eat anything save a sort of porridge made with milk and sugar. His dinners were worthy of Comus. Unable to touch anything himself, he enjoyed the delicate savour and sight of the food. He was surrounded by all the prettiest women, but they treated him as if he was of no consequence whatever, and tormented and teased him without ceasing.

Excitements of any kind he was told would be fatal to him, and were strictly forbidden, so his

pleasures were limited. Every evening his mansion was filled with a joyous company, the supper table sparkling with wit, and champagne corks and *bon-mots* flying, while the Crœsus who provided the entertainment, was in his bed unable to sleep for pain. The ladies used to take turns to come up and amuse him. They would surround his bed, and try with songs to lull him to sleep. They gained the title of *berceuses* to M. Beaujon. He really was an excellent man, and employed his great fortune for the good of his fellow-creatures.

M. de la Reynière, the famous epicure, owned another of the fine houses of Paris. It was in the Rue St. Honoré, next to the Pavillon Péronnet.[1] Of this dwelling it was said that it was the best inn in the capital for people of quality. People used to feign indifference, but in reality they were all mad to be invited there. M. de la Reynière's whole thought was centred on his food, what morsels he could swallow, and what menus he should compose. Society laughed at him, and turned him into ridicule while they accepted his hospitalities. With all his failings, he too was a kind, good man, always ready to assist those in trouble, and he was a constant patron of struggling artists.

[1] This "Pavillon" was the place where in 1848 the soldiers of the municipal guard made a heroic defence, and in which they were burnt alive by the populace. It is now destroyed. M. de la Reynière's house was occupied by the "Club Imperial."

Madame de la Reynière was a handsome woman, supposed to be dying, but well able to do the honours of her house. The Court ladies were very jealous of her beauty and success, and above all of the luxury in which she lived. Her rooms had to be seen to be described. They were models of taste and refinement, and filled with china and priceless cabinets. The Grand-Duchess spent two hours there, and yet did not see half the objects of virtu. When at last they descended to the dining-room, which was decorated to imitate a Greek temple, a man came forward from among the company, and bowed to the Grand-Duke. This was M. Clérisseau, architect to the Empress of Russia.

Paul returned the bow with the politeness which never failed him, and moved on.

The man barred the way and stopped him.

"What do you want, Monsieur?" said the Grand-Duke.

"You do not recognise me, Monseigneur?"

"Perfectly, Monsieur; you are M. Clérisseau."

"Why do you not speak to me, then?"

The courtiers standing round thought the man was mad, and Paul, shrugging his shoulders again, moved on, answering, "Because I have nothing to say to you."

"So you intend to treat me here as you did in Russia?" cried Clérisseau insolently, "and regard

me as a stranger, and refuse to know me—I, who am the Czarina's architect, and in constant correspondence with her. I have already written to the Empress, your mother, to complain of the reception you have given me in this country."

The whole party looked aghast, Paul hesitated a moment, then with a sarcastic smile he replied :

"Pray write to the Empress my mother that you are preventing me from moving on. For that, Monsieur, I am sure, she will be infinitely obliged to you."

This very unbecoming scene was most disagreeable for all, especially for the de la Reynières, who had allowed M. Clérisseau at his own request this opportunity of meeting their Imperial Highnesses. This man, who was puffed up with conceit, like the frog in the fable, was disgusted to find himself received politely and nothing more. He thought to punish the Grand-Duke by openly insulting him, but received himself the punishment due to him by being quietly ignored, owing to the tact and self-control which distinguished all Paul's actions.

On another occasion in a crowded assembly Paul overheard some one remark what an ugly man the Comte du Nord was. He turned to the Russian Ambassador, who was beside him, and who had naturally heard the remark, and said with an air of amusement, "If the French have the

character of being an amiable people, we may also credit them with being very candid."

The Duc d'Aumont requested that he might have the honour of receiving the Imperial visitors. When they arrived, they were received in the great entrance-hall of his princely abode. His retinue, in mourning liveries for his father, the late Duke, were assembled, and escorted them to the grand saloon. The Duke was the First Gentleman of the Chamber, and his brother, the Duc de Villequier, had the reversion of this post. The Duc d'Aumont used to say of this brother that his watch was always slow, for though he was an excellent man, with plenty of sense and intelligence, his indecision and weakness of character had passed into a proverb.

Their father was the most original and the most slovenly man in France. Once when looking at himself in a mirror, he said, "D'Aumont, God made you a gentleman, the King made you a Duke. You might do something in your turn—at least, you might go and shave!"

From this visit the Grand-Ducal party proceeded to the house of the Marquise de la Ferté-Imbault. She was the daughter of the famous Madame Geoffrin, and had been governess to Madame Elisabeth. Her hotel was the gathering-place of all the clever and learned persons of the day. But she had not inherited any of her mother's tastes,

and hated the philosophers and encyclopedists. At that time she was an old woman of sixty-seven, but her talents and her liveliness were in no way impaired by her age.

Before leaving Paris, the Comte and Comtesse du Nord visited the manufactory of Sèvres china, and bought three hundred thousand livres' worth of articles. A toilet-set of extreme beauty was offered to the Grand-Duchess. It was of blue lapis-lazuli colour, exquisitely painted with an embossed border to imitate pearls, the whole mounted in gold. The mirror was supported by the Three Graces, and two cupids played at their feet.

Marie Feodorowna was struck by the elegance of the design. "How truly lovely!" she exclaimed. "No doubt it is for the Queen?"

"Madame," replied the Comte d'Angivillers, who was showing them round, "the Queen offers it to the Comtesse du Nord, in the hope that it will please her and that she will keep it as a remembrance."

"I perceive that my arms are painted on it," said the Grand-Duchess. "The Queen is a thousand times too good. I must thank her myself; it is a most magnificent present."

Meanwhile the Comte du Nord was being shown a very handsome dinner-set, bearing the arms of Russia, which was a present from the King to

himself. They were both filled with anxiety as to how they should transport these royal presents in safety to their home, which, however, they succeeded in doing.

The last day they went in state to visit the Senate, which was a very imposing ceremony. Two senators received them with curtsies after the fashion of women, or the Gentlemen of the Robe. The Grand-Duchess, never having seen this proceeding, had great difficulty in keeping her countenance. They were conducted into a small covered balcony above the hall, from whence they could look down on the assembly, and hear what was going on. A very interesting case was in process of being heard, between the Marquis de Veynes and the Count de la Tour-du-Pin. They were afterwards taken round the building and shown everything of interest, including the lovely Sainte-Chapelle. All the counsellors were then presented, and made their curtsies. By this time the Comtesse du Nord was prepared for the ceremony, and maintained a very grave and dignified attitude.

They left Paris at the end of June with much regret. From high and low they had received nothing but kindness and attention. The Comte du Nord had won the hearts of the French people by his ready answers, at once courteous and witty. This quick appreciation of their remarks flattered

them greatly, and many of his answers were repeated afterwards. He had the art of saying the right thing at the right moment.

When M. de Malesherbes, the former Minister, was presented to Paul at the Académie, the latter remarked with great kindness: "It is doubtless to *this place* that M. de Malesherbes has retired," which courtly appreciation of his talents pleased the old man greatly, and when the Comte d'Artois was showing the Grand-Duke some beautiful swords, with blades of polished steel, just before that Prince's departure for the campaign in Spain, and offered him one of the weapons, "I will ask for one later," was Paul's reply, "and then I shall ask you to give me the one with which you have taken Gibraltar."

But now the time had come for the conclusion of this happy visit, and they were about to disperse, most of them never destined to meet again. Madame de Benckendorf was unable to accompany the Grand-Duchess. She was shortly expecting the birth of her first child, and was in a condition quite unfit for the fatigues of travelling. As they had still a prolonged tour before them, it was decided that she should go by easy stages to Montbéliard, and there await their arrival, the Baronne d'Oberkirch being invited to take her place.

This arrangement pleased both the Grand-

Duchess and Lanele. They intended to travel very simply in one coach, carrying out the idea of the incognito, and the Baronne d'Oberkirch and Prince Bariatinsky, were the only persons chosen to accompany them. The French Court had left Versailles, and it was arranged that they should lunch with them at Choisy on their way out of Paris, so that the last adieux might be made to the Royal Family.

CHAPTER VIII

ON June 19th the Comte and Comtesse du Nord left Paris with real grief, which they did their best to conceal. They had passed so many happy days there and made so many real friends, that it was an episode in their lives which they would never forget. Silently the four occupants of the coach drove through the streets of Paris on their way to Choisy, where the King and Queen were residing.

Though they had started early, the Royal breakfast was already over, but the travellers were promptly served. With the easy familiarity which characterised their intercourse with the Royal Family, the King and Queen walked round the table chatting with their guests, and hearing all that they had seen and done since the last meeting.

"How fortunate you are!" said Marie Antoinette. "You are going to make such a delightful tour. I wish I was in your place."

The day was passed in inspecting the Castle, which was beautifully situated on the banks of the Seine.

Louis XV. had been in the habit of living there a good deal, and his rooms were full of curiosities. Everything had been collected by him and placed to the best advantage about the apartments. The china was specially costly and beautiful. It was there that the famous magic table was kept. Louis XVI. never used it, and the springs had become rusty and useless. This table stood in a room into which Louis XV. used to invite only his particular friends, and it was intended to seat twelve persons. By means of weights it rose up out of the parquet floor, and was returned there, leaving no trace of its existence. The centre of the table could be pushed down, leaving the outer rim, and rose again with fresh dishes on it. This part was composed of a brass cylinder in the shape of a drum. Four dumb waiters, which moved by machinery, stood at the four corners, and worked in the same manner. All that was needed was to ring a bell, and a written request was placed on them, and they were shortly returned with all that was wanted. This ensured absolute privacy at meals. The table was destroyed in 1789, and thus one more of the many memories was effaced, that were linked with that Sovereign who was so good at heart and yet so led astray by evil counsellors.

With tears and embraces the two royal couples parted, for the Grand-Ducal party had to reach

Orleans that night, and the road was long. It was an intensely hot evening, and the journey was a trying one, for they were smothered with dust. Being such indefatigable sightseers, they omitted nothing of interest in this town. Here Prince Bariatinsky left them, and the Baron de Benckendorf, who had seen his wife safely to Montbéliard, took his place.

Slowly they moved along the lovely country of the Loire, a real terrestrial paradise.

"How my dear mother would enjoy this!" the Comtesse du Nord used to exclaim at intervals.

Wherever they went they distributed *largesse* with the utmost liberality. It is said that in France alone they disbursed two millions of francs!

One day at dinner they were discussing what we call the question of "tips," and Paul told the story of what he had given in Berlin at the time of his marriage. He gave magnificent presents to all the nobles of the Court of Prussia who had rendered him any kind of service. But first he took the precaution of consulting a Prussian General, who was a great friend of his, as to what gifts he should bestow.

One of the courtiers received a very handsome snuff-box, and grumbled to the General because he did not consider his present was of sufficient importance. The General, who knew the value of

the box, offered him a thousand crowns for it. This silenced the offender, who had the grace to blush at his own impudence.

Before reaching Blois they halted at the Castle of Ménars. This had been the property of Madame de Pompadour's brother, who had been made Marquis de Vandières by the late King.[1] He was a simple man of the name of Poisson, most quiet and unassuming. He and his wife were always well received. He had died about a year previously, leaving no children. He had been named Surveyor of Public Buildings, and given a post in the Chancellor's Office. These distinctions enabled him to wear the Blue Ribbon whenever he liked.

From the terrace of the Castle of Ménars a view like a panorama was unrolled before them. The Castles of Blois and Chambord could be seen, and many villages and towns in the Valley of the Loire. The gardens of Ménars were magnificent, and the building itself was very fine and filled with valuable collections.

They would have liked to stop at Chambord, where the Maréchal de Saxe died, but it was too far out of their way. They halted at Blois, however, just long enough to visit the Castle and see the hall where Guise was murdered.

[1] The courtiers, punning on this name, used privately to call him the Marquis *d'avant-hier!*

It is supposed that the French language is spoken with greater purity at Blois than anywhere else. Madame d'Oberkirch remarking on this in her diary, says:

To my Alsatian ears it is not a pleasant speech. Sing-song, with a drawl. I much prefer the accent of Paris.

The Comte du Nord, who could not bear passing anything of interest, begged to be allowed to stop at Amboise, an old royal castle where Charles VII. was born; but they were obliged to push forward without delay, Tours being their destination for that night. As the town came in sight the Grand-Duchess, having made some little remark aside to her husband, he kissed her, and then, turning to his companions, said solemnly, "I love my wife very dearly." Marie Feodorowna burst out laughing.

"Tell Lanele the story, I beg of you," she said, and Paul was quite willing, and related the following incident:

During their stay at Naples they drove from Portici to Pompeii, accompanied by the English Ambassador, Sir William Hamilton. The Grand-Duchess, having made some pleasing remark, her husband gallantly kissed the tips of her fingers, but he saw at once by the Baronet's grave face that the latter highly disapproved of any such

attentions in public. Paul concluded that he had offended the English sense of propriety, and mischievously determined to shock him still further. After some very lively conversation, he purposely kissed the Grand-Duchess again.

Sir William, quite out of countenance, put his head out of the window, and began to contemplate the landscape. When at last he turned once more towards the occupants of the carriage, the Comte du Nord said gravely, "M. le Chevalier, I love my wife very dearly."

"That is a perfectly natural sentiment, sir," replied Sir William with some embarrassment.

"Yes, is it not?" said Paul, and kissed his wife again, to the Ambassador's extreme confusion, she entering into the joke, and lending herself to it with much amusement.

They were still laughing over the story when the coach rattled over the cobble-stones of the streets of the capital of Touraine, where they put up at the inn, and got an execrable dinner and very bad beds, but, being all in the best of spirits, they accepted these misfortunes with much philosophy. The following night they slept at Angers, where the regiment of Royal-Lorraine turned out in their honour, and the band played under their windows.

The inn was quite an unpretentious one, and a

little servant-maid in cap and apron waited on them. She was extremely pretty and very intelligent. The Comtesse du Nord pointed her out to her husband, and they all began to look at her, which, however, did not appear to disconcert her at all. She bridled and smiled, showing a pearly row of teeth, in proof that she had overheard their remarks.

"What is your name, child?" asked the Grand-Duchess.

"Madame, my name is Jeanne, but they call me Javotte because they say I talk too much."

"Ah! you like talking, do you?" said Paul. "Will you talk to us?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"You are not shy, evidently."

"Why should I be shy with you? I know that you are a great Prince, as rich as our King, but you seem kind, and I am not half so much afraid of you as I am of the sub-lieutenants of Royal-Lorraine."

The Grand-Duke began to laugh.

"You see," he said, "that Javotte, who is afraid, and with reason, of the handsome young officers, is really of the same opinion as the Parisians."

This was an allusion to the remarks he had overheard one day in a Paris crowd as to his want of personal beauty.

"Well, Javotte," he continued, "as you think I

look good, and as you are not afraid of me, what do you want me to do for you? How can I help you?"

The girl smiled and blushed, and twisted her apron round her fingers like a little soubrette on the stage.

"I do not know," she murmured; "perhaps you could——"

"Tell me frankly—have you a lover?"

She became crimson at this question, in spite of her former ease of manner, her embarrassment showing that she was not over-bold after all.

"Yes, your Highness—Bastien Raulé, at your service."

"What is he?"

"A stone-cutter. It is a good enough trade, but a very dirty and tiresome one. Anyway, not good enough to marry on."

"And what do you earn?"

"Just my wages—ten crowns a year."

"Is he nice looking?"

Javotte brightened up at this question. "Ah, yes, Monsieur, much handsomer than all the officers of Royal-Lorraine!"

"And how much do you need to get married?"

"A great deal of money, Monsieur; perhaps as much as one hundred crowns."

She crimsoned again, after giving utterance to such an audacious statement.

The Comte du Nord smiled to his wife; he wanted to give her the pleasure of making a gift.

"Come here, Javotte, my child," she said, "and hold out your apron."

The Grand-Duchess opened her purse and took out fifteen louis, and dropped them into the little maid's apron. The astonishment of the latter was too great for words. In her amazement she dropped the corners of her apron, and the money rolled on the floor. She raised her eyes piously to Heaven, and said, "Is it possible? My God, I thank Thee!" Her eyes filled with tears, and without seeking to pick up the scattered coins, she lifted the hem of the Princess's robe and carried it to her lips, with a touching simplicity and grace.

They were so delighted at this little episode that they talked of nothing else during supper. Lanele remarked that the popularity of the Comte du Nord recalled that of Henri IV.

Next morning, very early, they went to see the regiment of Royal-Lorraine on parade. As they were stepping into their coach, Javotte appeared, holding a fine young fellow by the hand, both in their Sunday clothes, and each with an immense bouquet of roses. They made profound salutations, and offered their flowers, which were graciously accepted. The poor girl was so overcome she could not utter a word—very different to her joyous chatter of the day before.

At Houdon, where they halted in the middle of the day, they were received by a lady, a handsome woman about forty years of age, the owner of a property in the neighbourhood, who came to pay her respects to the Comte and Comtesse du Nord. She was a *dame damée*, or lady with brevet rank. There were a number of women in France who held this distinction, and some of them were quite young. This usage was introduced into the Court circle under Louis XV., but it was much abused and so conducive to bad morals, that they began to see it was a mistake, and it ceased to be granted except under very exceptional circumstances. The idea was, that girls of quality could with this title be presented at Court, and enjoy all the advantages accruing therefrom.

The town of Nantes in Lower Brittany greatly interested the travellers, principally on account of the edict of Henri IV. in favour of the Protestants, which was revoked by Louis XIV. "God alone knows what will be the result," writes the Baronne d'Oberkirch.

They were received by the Colonel of the Dauphin-Infanterie, the King having given orders that they were to be treated everywhere with royal honours, and the regiments turned out for their inspection. They proceeded on their way by boat to Mussilac, where they were to sleep.

The inns were deplorable. The Comtesse du Nord was immensely amused at the sleeping accommodation which was provided for her at this place. All the hangings and embroideries of the Virgin's shrines for ten miles round had been collected and heaped on the bed. She and Lanele, who shared her room, laughed heartily over this novel arrangement. The Grand-Duke stayed up all night writing, and declined to go to bed at all.

The heat was intense, and they halted at Vannes to rest in the middle of the day, quite exhausted, the dust, the flies, and the burning sun having made the road intolerable. They were not sorry when at nightfall they reached Lorient, for there the cool sea breezes revived them.

They spent the evening rowing in the harbour, which was filled with vessels of all nations, and the ships saluted them as they passed. Their next stage was Brest, the most important maritime station in Brittany. The Commandant of the port was a certain Count Hector. This rather singular name caused the poor man to be the subject of perpetual puns. He was twitted with being the son of Priam, and they hoped he would prove worthy of commencing a new branch of the Hectors.

The flag-ship was the *Invincible*, commanded by the Count de la Motte Piquet, one of the

great naval officers of the day. He had distinguished himself at Fort-Royal, and had captured twenty-six vessels from the English Admiral Rodney. He had a fleet of seven men-of-war under him, and ordered a mock naval engagement to take place for the amusement of the Imperial visitors. After dinner they were present at the launching of a *frigate*, and the ships were dressed, and in the evening the harbour was illuminated in honour of the Grand-Duchess. The next day was spent in inspecting the regiments and the hulks of the convicts. The heat all this time was tropical.

Madame Hector held a reception of the principal ladies of Brest, who were all presented to the Grand-Duke and Duchess. The sights of Brest interested Paul greatly. The workings of a great maritime port are marvellous, and the descendant of Peter the Great might well have a taste for what was the absorbing interest of his ancestor. The streets of Brest must have been in a bad way at that time, for no carriage was possible, and the ladies went about in Sedan chairs.

More reviews, naval and military, took place next day, and the Comtesse du Nord and Lanele began to be very weary of them. Their amusement to while away the time used to be to watch the people who surrounded the carriage, and try to find among them likenesses to their acquaintances.

One woman, the Grand-Duchess declared, was the image of one of the bed-chamber women of Marie Antoinette, at first she thought it must be she.

There was rather a curious story about this same bed-chamber woman. One day at Fontainebleau the King met her out walking, richly dressed and covered with diamonds. Why this was so is not explained. Louis, knowing the face, though unable to fix the name, concluded it was one of the Court ladies, and bowed graciously. This came to the ears of the Queen, who made a great joke of it. The incident raised a good deal of talk, and it was suggested that such persons should be obliged to wear a little apron when off duty, as a token of their position. This, however, was never carried out. The woman became an object of notice, and people used to point her out.

Lower Brittany was exactly like a foreign country, and with a language which they could not understand. It was a corruption of the Celtic tongue, and they were told that it was the same language, slightly modified, that was spoken in the mountains of Wales. It was their opinion that the speech of Brittany was further removed from French than was that of Alsace from the pure Saxon of Germany.

Food was excellent in this part of the country, but badly served, and everything very dirty. The

inhabitants in their coats of skins reminded the Comte du Nord of Tartars.

There is no doubt that the Grand-Ducal party must have roughed it as though they were ordinary travellers, which must have been a very novel experience for them.

At Broon, a small village where they halted, the dinner was composed of eggs only, served up in every possible form. Rennes was the first place at which they found really good food and lodging, but the town did not interest them sufficiently to cause them to linger there.

While dining at Vitré the conversation at table turned on Madame de Montesson, for no particular reason except that she was a Bretonne, and she was neither loved nor respected in her own country. Perhaps Paul had been annoyed at the inconvenience they suffered at her party, as was mentioned before, for he remarked that he had made it a rule during his stay in Paris that he would not dine at the house of any private person, not even at hers. She had hoped and expected that he would do so. He added. "Out of respect for the etiquette which refused her the honours due to a Duchess of Orleans, we agreed to appear at her party."

They then began to discuss the Comte d'Artois, whom they had liked immensely. He was far more agreeable than his brother, the Comte de Provence, but his infidelity to his wife was well

known in Paris. As usual this had been made the subject of a witty remark, and the saying was, "Monsieur d'Artois, having had an indigestion of *biscuits de Savoie*,[1] took *du Thé*."[2]

From Brittany they proceeded to Normandy, and stopped at Alençon, where the Grand-Duchess bought many yards of beautiful lace. At Séez the Chevalier de Broglie arrived, on behalf of the Maréchal de Broglie, requesting the Comte and Comtesse du Nord to do them the honour of stopping at Broglie the following day. This they decided to do, as to refuse would have been too pointed a slight, but the Grand-Duchess said she would prefer to burn Broglie rather than go there.[3]

The Maréchal, it was well known, was brusque and disagreeable. Of course, she did not expect him to treat her rudely, but she declared that the visit was a *corvée*, and looked upon it as an unpleasant duty.

"My good Lanele," she remarked, "I often wish I was Dorothea once more, without the obligations and duties of Marie Feodorowna."

The Maréchal had caused a bridge to be built at the bottom of the park, so that a direct road

[1] The Comtesse d'Artois was of the House of Savoy.

[2] The popular actress Mademoiselle Duthé.

[3] The Maréchal de Broglie was in command during the Austrian and French alliance. He was a sluggish, incapable man, unpopular among his own officers and detested by Frederick. He was the cause of the failure of the campaign in Bavaria.

to the Castle would thus be opened for their Imperial Highnesses. A magnificent collation was prepared, of which no one partook. They only stayed an hour, and walked about the place. They were all very cold, very distant, and very bored, and both parties were equally glad to be quit of each other, in spite of an appearance of civility.

From there they travelled to Rouen, where Prince Bariatinsky arrived to greet them, and brought all the latest news from Versailles, so that they felt quite in touch with Paris once more. He was also the bearer of a charming Sèvres cup, a gift from the Queen. It was unique, as the mould had been broken. On it were painted the portraits of Paul and Marie, and on the reverse side were those of the Dauphin and Madame Royale, all the likenesses being excellent. An autograph letter from Marie Antoinette accompanied the present, which the Grand-Duchess received with evident pleasure.

A performance was given for them at the theatre, which lasted so long that the Comtesse du Nord was worn out with fatigue.

"I wish," she said, "that I was a good Norman peasant, and could be left alone with my husband in a peaceful hut."

"I trust if your Highness was a shepherdess," answered Lanele, laughing, "that you would have a lamb tied up with ribbons, and a wreath of roses,

and that you would walk about with a crook and a canary on your finger in the orthodox fashion!"

Madame de Beuvron, wife of the Governor of Normandy, took the Imperial visitors round Rouen, and did the honours of the town. Under a burning sun they appeared on the parade-ground, and the two regiments of Orléans-Infanteric and Royal-Vaisseaux-Dragons were paraded before them.

"How heavy are the penalties of greatness!" said the Comte du Nord, when at last he found himself back in his own travelling-coach. "Surely in this awful heat they might have left us alone, and those poor men also!"

After leaving Lille, when driving on the road to Dunkerque, they were much struck by the beauty and order of the roads. The picturesque villages with houses in trim gardens, already bespoke the well-known cleanliness and neatness of Flanders.

The Prince de Robecq had accompanied them to the frontier, and entertained them at dinner at Dunkerque, with the most excellent dishes of fish and highly piquant stories. Once more the wearied travellers were shown round. Madame d'Oberkirch records the following in the diary:

July 8th.—Eternal promenades to see everything—the fortifications, the port, the artillery soldiers, and all the rest of it! After dinner we are to bid good-bye to France and enter the Low Countries. We are to sleep at Ostend.

They journeyed there by water, and on landing were received by the wife of the Governor, the Duke of Saxe-Teschen. This lady was the Arch-Duchess Christine and sister of Marie Antoinette. She was accompanied by the whole of the staff which composed their little Court, and consisted of Prince of Stahremberg, the Prime Minister, the Prince of Grimberghe, Master of the Horse, the Prince of Garve, Maréchal, the Comte de Sart, Master of the Household, and the Prince de Ligne. The latter met the Grand-Duke with the greatest pleasure.

This very name brings to mind, a man renowned for all time as one of the most charming and witty nobles of an epoch, when so many brilliant Frenchmen ranked under this head. He had distinguished himself greatly in the Seven Years' War, and had been promoted to Lieutenant-General. The Emperor Joseph had the utmost confidence in him, as also had the Czarina.

All these persons formed a most agreeable Court, and the evening passed in a very pleasant manner. The Prince de Ligne outstayed the rest of the company, and entertained the visitors with no end of amusing stories, among others the following episode which had occurred to himself during one of his journeys to Paris.

He had a young niece who was completing her education in the Capucin Convent in the Rue

Saint-Antoine. She was some relation of the Lichtensteins, but he only spoke of her by her name of Charlotte. She was a pretty girl, and the Prince was very fond of her, and often went to visit her.

She frequently alluded to an inmate of the Convent who was exceedingly beautiful and about to take the veil. Her descriptions were so glowing that he became quite anxious to see this lovely girl, and asked his niece if it would be possible to do so. She replied that the ceremony would take place in the interior of the Convent, and that women only would be admitted.

The Prince was annoyed at this answer, but not discouraged.

The evening before the day fixed, he came again to the Convent, and sought an interview with Countess Charlotte.

"Tell me, my dear child," said he, "can you get admission to-morrow for one of my relations, a canoness of a chapter in Paris, who wishes to be present in the chapel?"

"Certainly, Uncle, if you wish it," she replied; and as all that was required was a seat in the church, and as the lady in question would not penetrate into the interior, no obstacle was raised.

At the appointed time this saintly personage duly arrived, dressed in black, and enveloped in

cloak and hood, only the tip of her nose being visible. She wore a cross as large as a plate, suspended round her neck by a blue ribbon, and carried her card of admission in her hand. Her eyes were piously cast down, and she bowed silently on entering. It was noticed that she took care to get a good seat, from which the best view of the proceedings could be seen.

Apparently she did manage to see very well, for she carried away an impression that never left her afterwards. It was that of a most lovely girl, who, pale and sad, was led to the altar. Her air was resigned, but totally without fervour. At the supreme moment, she raised her beautiful eyes to Heaven with a look difficult to describe—a look of reproach and dumb regret, and yet with the calm and gentle resignation of a victim condemned to inevitable death.

"I have a theory," continued the Prince de Ligne, "that even the most matter-of-fact people have, in spite of themselves, some romantic moments in their lives. We none of us can escape this, it is the tribute we pay to the imagination. Well, I do not profess to be as wise as Socrates. I confess I have a weak side to my nature. The inevitable romance for me was that young creature languishing at the foot of the altar, like a tropical plant denied the sunshine. I see her still in my

dreams, and I find myself dreaming of her in my waking hours. I cannot say I loved her, yet I build up over her memory thousands of castles in Spain, which I as promptly overthrow. It is certain she does not know even my name. I never spoke to her, I have never seen her since, I shall never see her again. She was but a passing phantom in my life. But if I lived for a hundred years, that phantom would still occupy the same place, and nothing would efface it."

As they listened to this moving tale, their lively spirits died away, and a melancholy settled down on the little party. The Comtesse du Nord, who was naturally very impressionable, was almost in tears. The Prince, who had not expected that his story would have had such an effect on his hearers, hastily changed the conversation, and with the change, brought back the spirits of the company. He was a real magician where conversation was concerned.

"Monsieur," asked the Comte du Nord, when cheerfulness was restored, "tell us, did the Countess Charlotte penetrate your disguise?"

"The little minx was quite capable of doing so, Monsieur, but she had tact enough never to mention the subject to me. Once, however, in writing to her mother she penned these lines: 'I know a story about the Prince de Ligne, but with

your permission, my dear mother, I will not mention it either to you or to anybody else.' "

"Charlotte was a sensible girl," remarked the Comtesse du Nord, smiling.

"I agree with you, Madame," replied the Prince, "and I find that she grows more and more so every day."

CHAPTER IX

FROM Ostend the party went by canal, which they found a most comfortable mode of travelling. The Archduchess Christine accompanied them, and asked them endless questions about her dear sister. She admired the Sèvres cup immensely, and said to Marie Feodorowna:

"If it would not annoy you, dear Madame, I will ask the Queen to send me a similar one. Of course, it cannot be quite the same, as the mould for yours was broken, but it would give me much pleasure to possess the portraits."

The Comtesse du Nord, needless to say, responded with a cordial assent.

The day passed in pleasant talk as their barge glided past the low banks, till at a sharp bend in the canal, the town of Ghent, with its many spires and belfries, came into sight.

They spent the following morning in exploring the town, but they were not so impressed with the old Flemish cities as modern travellers are. Madame d'Oberkirch writes:

I did not see anything very remarkable. These old towns resemble each other, and bear the mark of the Spanish dominion, with a curious touch of Moorish architecture, which looks out of place in these northern places.

She much preferred Brussels, which town she found very handsome and commodious, and something like Paris, though not in any way equal to it.

Their first evening there was as usual spent at the theatre. Hardly were they given time to dress and remove the traces of travel before they were hurried to the Opera House, where a gala performance was taking place. The play was a very lengthy one, the poor Grand-Duchess, who had been in the open air all day, nearly fell asleep in the Archduchess's box, and was so tired she refused to have any supper, but went straight to bed as soon as it was over. The Grand-Duke, however, said he was starving, and so did Lanele, so they joined a small supper-party which included Prince Kourakin, who had come to Brussels to meet them.

Paul made himself particularly pleasant, and the conversation turned on presentiments, dreams, and second sight. Each person related his experiences, giving the most accurate details in proof of the truth of his story.

The Grand-Duke remained quite silent.

"And you, Monseigneur," asked the Prince de Ligne presently, "have you nothing to tell us? Is Russia alone exempt from the supernatural and the marvellous? Have devils and sorcerers exempted you from their witchcrafts?"

Paul shook his head. "I could tell you a tale if I liked, as Kourakin knows well. But I do not care to give way to such thoughts, indeed, I have suffered too much from them in the past."

No one answered.

The Grand-Duke looked across at his friend, and said rather sadly, "Is it not the case, Kourakin, that a very strange experience happened to me?"

"So strange, Monseigneur, that in spite of the respect with which I ever regard your statements, I am fain to confess I have always considered it a play of your imagination.

"But it was true, very true, and if Madame d'Oberkirch will promise never to repeat it to my wife, I will tell you the story now. I also beg of you gentlemen to keep this secret, as profoundly as though it were a diplomatic one, for I should not care to have a ghost story respecting myself noised abroad throughout Europe."

Every member of the party gave the desired promise, and waited impatiently for the Grand-Duke to begin.

"One evening, or rather one night, I was strolling in the streets of St. Petersburg with

Kourakin, followed by two attendants. We had been sitting up smoking till quite late, when the idea seized us to go out and inspect the town by moonlight. We took a couple of men-servants with us, but otherwise wished to maintain a strict incognito. It was not cold, the days were already lengthening, and it was one of those mild periods in our spring, which, however, compare badly with that season in the south. We were in great spirits, not dwelling on any serious, or religious subjects, indeed, Kourakin was joking and making facetious remarks on the passers-by. I was walking in front, followed by my valet. Kourakin was a little way behind, and the other man brought up the rear. The moon was so brilliant it would have been easy to read a letter by the light of it. In consequence the shadows were long and deep.

"At the corner of one of the streets, in the dark recess of a doorway, I saw a tall, thin man, standing wrapped in a cloak like a Spaniard, with a military slouch hat over his eyes. He appeared to be waiting for some one, and came out of his shelter as we approached, and placed himself on my left hand, without saying a word or making any gesture.

"It was impossible to distinguish his features, but as he walked on the pavement, the sound of his feet was like the noise of one stone striking against another.

"At first I was surprised at this encounter, then I began to think that my side nearest to him, and which he almost touched, was becoming singularly cold. An icy shiver went through me, and I turned back to Kourakin, and said, 'This is an extraordinary companion that we have picked up.'

"'What companion?' he asked.

"'Why, this man who is walking on my left. Do you mean to say you do not see a man in a cloak between me and the wall?'

"'Your Highness is against the wall yourself, there is not room for any one between you and it,' he replied eagerly.

"I stretched out my arm, and, sure enough, I struck the wall, and yet the man was there all the time, walking with that strange metallic sound, and suiting his steps to mine. I then began to look at him more closely, and I saw under the shadow of the hat, that his eyes shone with a light such as I had never seen before. The eyes fascinated me. I could not escape from their glitter.

"'Ah!' I exclaimed to Kourakin, 'I do not know what it is, but I feel something very strange.'

"I was trembling not from fear, but from cold. My blood was congealed in my veins. All at once a hollow, melancholy voice, proceeded from out of the folds of the mantle, and called me by name, 'Paul!' Mechanically I replied, 'What

do you want?' I felt impelled by some unknown power to answer him.

"'Paul!' he repeated.

"This time the accent was gentle, but very sad. I waited in silence. He called me a third time, 'Paul! poor Paul! poor Prince!' He stopped short, and I felt constrained to do the same.

"I turned towards Kourakin, who had stopped also, and said, 'Do you hear nothing?'

"'Nothing, Monseigneur, absolutely.'

"But I still heard the mysterious voice sounding in my ears, and with a supreme effort I asked the weird stranger who he was, and what he wanted.

"Who am I? Poor Paul! I am one who is interested in you. What do I want? I want you not to attach yourself too strongly to this world, for you will not stay here long. Live justly if you desire to die in peace, and do not think lightly of evil deeds. Remorse is one of the deepest torments of a noble soul.' He ceased to speak, and continued his walk, and I did the same. He spoke no more, and I had no inclination to speak to him. He led the way, I following in silence, and this continued for an hour. I do not know where we went, and Kourakin and the servants could not think what to make of it. Look at the Prince now—he is smiling, I know he thinks that I dreamed it all.

"At last we reached the great square between

the bridge over the Neva, and the Palace of the Senators. The man went straight for a certain point, I following him closely. There he stopped again and said, 'Adieu, Paul, you will see me again here or elsewhere.' Then he lifted his hat suddenly, and I saw his features quite clearly. I started back with astonishment, for it was the swarthy countenance, and eagle eye, and stern smile, of my ancestor Peter the Great.

"When I had recovered from my surprise and terror he had vanished.

"The spot to which he had led me is where my mother the Empress, is at this present time raising a monument, which will soon be the admiration of all Europe. It is a statue of the Czar Peter on horseback, standing on an immense block of granite. It was not I who suggested this place to my mother, and I confess when I found the statue placed there, I was seized with a sudden dread. *I am afraid of being afraid*, though here is Prince Kourakin trying to persuade me that I was dreaming, when wide awake and walking about the streets of the capital. I remember every detail of this vision, and I firmly believe, as I sit here, that it all took place as I have described. I came back to the palace worn out with fatigue, and my side felt absolutely frozen. It needed many hours in a very warm bed, to bring me round, and restore my circulation. I hope you consider my story

convincing, and that you will not accuse me of telling you a falsehood."

"Do you know what it proves, Monseigneur?" asked the Prince de Ligne.

"It proves that I shall die young, Monsieur."

"Forgive me for not being of your opinion, Monseigneur, it proves incontestably two things—the first is, it is unwise to walk about at night when one is sleepy, and the other is, you should not lean up against a half-frozen wall in your climate. Those are the only morals I can deduce from your story. Pardon me for saying so, but the sight you had of your illustrious ancestor existed only in your imagination. I would not mind betting that the left side of your coat was covered with dust from the wall. Was it not the case, Monsieur?" continued the Prince, turning towards Kourakin.

But in spite of the admirable theories of the Prince de Ligne, the story caused a deep impression on the little company. Madame d'Oberkirch records it with this remark, "Few people have heard this strange tale, for the Grand-Duke does not like repeating it. The Grand-Duchess has never heard it, and never will. Her sensitive nature would be too much troubled."

The following morning, the Archduchess and her husband escorted their Imperial visitors round Brussels. They went over the Cathedral of Sainte

Gudule, admired the beautiful architecture of the Hôtel de Ville, visited the lace manufactories, and the *béguinages*. They were much struck by the latter institutions, which existed only in Flanders. These communities continue to the present day, and are a sort of convent for pious unmarried women, not bound by any vows. Those who can work for their living, are lodged in the houses of rich *béguines*, who entertain them gratuitously. Those who are sickly or infirm, are tended by a superior, and are given occupations suitable to their condition.

These saintly women owe their institution and their title, to a priest named Monsieur Lebègue, who first collected a few young women together, and inspired them with a desire to live in perpetual virginity. The community dates from the twelfth century.

These *béguines* are to be found all over Flanders. They wear a particular headdress, and people think that this *coif* is the origin of their name. Is it not rather the congregation that gives the name to the *coif*? Marie Feodorowna and Lanele talked to many of these ladies, and found them in a state of quietude and placidity somewhat to be envied. Nothing in the world affects them. They think only of a future life, and the sorrows of this one do not touch them.

From a Protestant point of view (writes Lanele) there is something wanting in these retreats. We have more merit while we remain on the battle-field of life, if we combat our passions and our misfortunes, till God calls us Home.

That evening there was a State banquet at the Palace, and the Comtesse du Nord appeared, magnificently dressed, and caused quite a sensation. She wore a gown which had just been sent from Paris, by Mdlle. Bertin. It was brocaded with large velvet flowers, and trimmed with a filmy lace made of gold threads, it looked like a fairy's robe. The floral decorations, a wreath and sprays, were a *chef d'œuvre* in themselves.

The Palace was a very fine building, and dated from several centuries back, and the little Court was extremely elegant. The Archduchess reigned over it in a most agreeable manner. She was very like the Queen of France, only much less beautiful and many years older. She had not the fine figure of Marie Antoinette, indeed, it was said that she was deformed.

She wore her famous pearls that night, they were said to be the finest in Europe. Pearls were considered, and justly so, to be more flattering to the complexion than diamonds. The ladies of the time of Louis XIV. discovered this, as Mignard's portraits can testify, for they invariably were painted adorned with pearls, and wore no other jewels.

One of the Archduchess's pearls, a very fine pear-shaped stone, was sick, and undergoing treatment. The Comtesse du Nord gave her a remedy which had been sent to Catherine by the Shah of Persia. Part of the prescription was, to wear the sick jewel night and day to give it back its fading life. There is a theory that pearls live! If so, what are their sensations? Lanele once told Madame de Genlis, when she met her at the house of the Duchesse de Bourbon, that a good romance could be written entitled "The History of a Pearl." Madame de Genlis said she would think about it, but literature was never enriched by this theme from her pen.

From Brussels they visited both Malines and Antwerp. At the former place the Grand-Duchess naturally bought some of the world-famed lace, she also purchased some specimens of gilt leather which particularly took her fancy. It was of Flemish manufacture, though called Spanish. The pictures in Antwerp fascinated them. The school of painting in Russia was still in its infancy, though Peter the Great had bestowed much attention on the introduction of the fine arts into his country, and used to send young men to study in Italy. The art galleries of Europe filled the Grand-Duke and his wife with admiration. They stood in raptures before the "Descent from the Cross" in Antwerp Cathedral.

When Paul became Emperor, the remembrance of these priceless works of art, caused him to take infinite trouble to improve the standard of painting in the Academy of St. Petersburg, but the Russians were not an artistic nation. Holland yet remained to be visited, and with regret the Imperial party quitted Brussels and their charming hosts, who had made their stay in the Netherlands so delightful. Every day the autocratic Catherine required to be informed of their movements. Not a step could be taken without her sanction, and Marie Feodorowna would not linger, for fear of losing any of the few and precious days allowed them for their stay in Alsace. The Empress did her best to prevent her son learning what was passing in Russia during his absence. By means of a friendly aide-de-camp at the Czarina's Court, named Bibikoff, Prince Kourakin attempted to obtain information for Paul. Unfortunately the letters were intercepted, and the Czarina's wrath fell upon the unlucky aide, and he was promptly exiled to Astrachan.

At Mordeck the Russian Court embarked on four yachts, sent by the Stadtholder to convey them by water to Rotterdam. These boats were admirably appointed, and the royal table was furnished by the reigning Prince, whose guests they became from the moment they entered his territory.

It was a lovely summer evening as the boats entered the Meuse, and glided down between the wooded banks, the dark foliage lighted up by the rays of the setting sun. They passed white houses nestling among the trees, or surrounded by gardens filled with the choicest flowers. An air of peace and plenty reigned, to which in their northern land they must have been quite unaccustomed. The stillness was broken only by the chiming of the clocks from the distant villages, and the tinkle of the bells as the cattle were driven homeward, and by the lapping of the water against the sides of the ship.

Marie Feodorowna could not be persuaded to go below even when the hour grew late, and when the moon shone forth, and bathed the scene in her silvery light, she stood by the side of her husband, surrounded by her little Court, drinking in the calm beauty of the night. Long did the memory of it linger in her mind.

The Prince de Ligne, and the Russian Ambassador Prince Galitzin, also accompanied them. They reached Rotterdam at noon the next day, where the Prince and Princess of Orange received them in state. The town was in gala, flags flying and bands playing, but they only remained there long enough to take a drive, and continued their journey by canal to The Hague.

It was not the season for tulips, the national flower of the Dutch, so they only stopped at Delft to see the china.

The churches of Holland struck them as cold and bare, after the ornate edifices of the Romish creed. At The Hague they proceeded to the Maison des Bois, which was the summer residence of the Stadtholder.

The Princess of Orange, a very clever and intellectual woman, was the niece of Frederick the Great and cousin of the Princess of Montbéliard. Her husband William V. was a very delicate man. He had a dreadful habit of falling asleep at meals, and once covered himself with disgrace, and shocked his subjects, by slumbering in the Senate House. All Dutchmen are said to have a mania for either tulips or china. He had neither, but he had a great hobby for stuffed animals, and his natural history collection was one of the best in the world. His great desire was to imitate the King of Prussia, and he used to rise at four in the morning, and proceed to work, which perhaps accounted for his little failing before mentioned. In spite however of many good qualities, he was not popular with the people of Holland.

A State dinner was followed by a visit to the theatre. "Once more we have to go through it all." sighed the Comtesse du Nord, but she

certainly was an indefatigable sightseer, either willingly or not.

From the play they drove back to the Maison des Bois, where they found the woods illuminated and a banquet and ball going on. The women of Holland were handsome, but inclined to embonpoint. The French Ambassador at The Hague was the Duc de Vauguyon, his mother had been a de Breteuil. His Duchess would not appear at Court because of some dispute about her rank. She had been a Mdlle. de Pons de Rochfort, and lady-in-waiting to Madame, and had the *grand entrée* at Versailles.

Kings' representatives never give way on points of etiquette, and they are perfectly right. What the special point in dispute was at the Court of the Stadtholder is not clear, but he would not give way, nor the lady either.

The interests of the Prince of Orange were attached to England rather than to France, as the latter meditated the lowering of the House of Orange, so the position of the Duc de Vauguyon was a difficult one. So, probably, was that of the Imperial party, in spite of the relationship between Marie Feodorowna, and the reigning Princess. They had come from France so lately, and had so endeared themselves to every one there, that a slight stiffness must have been experienced when they found themselves among these conflicting elements.

So the visit at the Court of William V. was shortened as much as civility would allow, though the Comte and Comtesse du Nord were still desirous of spending some days travelling about Holland to see the principal towns.

At Haarlem they were shown one of the gardens most famous for its horticultural treasures. Here among other rare plants they saw China roses for the first time. These were then esteemed a very great novelty.

But the place of all others they wished to see was Saardam, for though only a small village it contained relics of Peter the Great. With infinite respect they entered the rude wooden cabin in which the great Czar had lived, while learning the trade of ship-building. It was composed of one room only, with a recess where the bed had been, and some portions of a faded curtain were still hanging there. Paul had an immense veneration for his ancestor, nothing therefore could have been shown him which would have given him so much satisfaction, and he lingered among these relics of the past asking an infinity of questions, and trying to realise to himself a picture of that wonderful monarch in this humble dwelling-place.

At Martzen a certain Lady Lockhart received them in a beautiful house where she resided. She came of an old Scottish family. A Lockhart had been Ambassador in France in Cromwell's time.

The Comte du Nord, who was well up in historical facts, did not fail to mention this to his hostess.

Utrecht was the last town they visited, the proximity of the Rhine announced that the limit of Holland had been reached. Voltaire apostrophized it on his departure in these words: "Adieu, canards, canaux, canailles!"

The Imperial party took a more dignified, and courteous farewell.

CHAPTER X

THE weather had become extremely wet and unpleasant, although it was only the middle of July, and the whole party were impatient to reach Alsace. Yet nothing made Paul, or Marie Feodorowna, relax their efforts to please those who assembled to do them honour, and they once more stopped in Belgium on their way back, this time at Spa, where the Archduchess, and her husband the Duke of Saxe-Teschen, had come on purpose to entertain them.

Among the party gathered to meet them were the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester. She was sister-in-law to George III., and was a Walpole. Her first husband had been Lord Waldegrave. The King did not approve of this marriage, for she was not of royal birth, but he always received her very kindly.

The visitors were taken to see the springs, and tasted the mineral waters at the "Pouhon" and the "Sauvenière," which are in vogue to this day. They slept one night at Aix-la-Chapelle, to see the spot where the Emperors were formerly

crowned, and where the great Charlemagne was buried. Paul stood beside the tomb for a long time in silence, and at last said solemnly, "This then is the end of glory and power, and what remains? A name which does not always survive, and a few feet of ground. Ah! happiness is better than wealth, and contentment than a crown. These cause us to be better here and happier hereafter." He turned as he spoke to his wife with the tenderest expression, and took her hand in his. Marie Feodorowna's beautiful eyes filled with tears at this touching proof of his affection.

As she drew nearer to her old home her impatience increased. At Frankfurt they were met by some of her relations, her aunt of Brandenburg-Schwedt, and her two young brothers, the Princes Louis and Eugene, of Wurtemberg. This evening of family reunion was spent in laughter and gaiety. Once more the Grand-Duchess was surrounded by those dear to her. The young Princes gave her all the latest news from home, and told her what was happening in the neighbourhood, where the nobility were making great preparations to receive the Grand-Duke.

"It will be the most amusing thing in the world," said Eugene to his sister, "to see the out-of-date dresses, and antique coaches, which will be turned out to-morrow. Some have not seen the light of day for forty years. I had a

look at a few of them, and they are worth preserving as curiosities. You had better lay in a good stock of gravity, for it will be hard work to keep our countenances."

The etiquette of a little Court always far exceeds that of a more important one. The minutest trifles are considered, and German susceptibility made it necessary that no mistakes should occur. The Comtesse du Nord, having been warned of this, was careful to receive the ladies with all due regard to their respective rank and precedence, and answered all their many questions in the most affable manner. One old dowager insisted on being told every detail of the private life of the great Catherine, and how she spent her time from morning till night.

"Tell me, Madame, at what hour does the Czarina rise?"

"And what does she do after that, Madame?"

"At what hour does she have her meals, and does she go to bed very late, Madame?"

These and many others were the trivial questions asked.

"As you are so interested in hearing all these details of the life of the Czarina, Madame," replied the Comtesse du Nord, "would you be willing to imitate her in every respect?"

"In everything? No, I cannot say that, but in all that is possible—yes!"

This was too much for the Princes, who had to walk away to conceal their merriment. The Grand-Duke, however, came to the rescue, and turned the conversation with a civil remark.

At Schwetzingen the Baron d'Oberkirch and his little daughter met the travellers. Lanele's happiness was now complete as she clasped her child in her arms, and then led her with pride to her illustrious god-mother. Marie Feodorowna took the little creature on her lap, and showered caresses on her. Doubtless her own heart often ached for want of her little ones.

To delay at Strasburg was more than the impatience of the whole party could brook, so they promised the good people that they would pay them a visit before their final departure for Russia. Étupes was, however, too far to be reached in one day, so they halted for the night at Colmar.

The Comte du Nord was greatly taken with this town, which was beautifully situated, surrounded by mountains, a chain of the Vosges, many of their summits crowned by ruined castles. The evening being fine, they sat out in the garden of the inn, which faced the Cathedral, and admired the prospect.

In Alsace, there is a superstition that storks bring luck, and the people encourage them to build their nests on their housetops. A wheel had been placed on the roof of the Cathedral among

the buttresses, to induce the birds to take shelter under it.

The little party, resting in the garden after the exertions of the day, saw against the red glow of the evening sky, the sombre silhouettes of the parent birds standing out clearly from the pinnacle, where they were keeping watch over their nests at this safe altitude. Evidently one of the young brood was still absent, as they flew about at intervals uttering cries of anxiety and unrest. Presently the missing member was to be seen making for home, closely followed by a huge bird of prey. Shrieks of terror rent the air, and when the young stork at last reached the nest, it fell exhausted into it, while the father went out to drive away the foe and defend his little ones. A terrible battle ensued, the stork displaying great courage, upheld and strengthened by the powerful instinct of paternity, but though his mate came to his rescue, their efforts were unavailing against this tyrant of the air. When the tide of victory had turned against them, and the male bird lay dead on the battlefield, the mother, with almost incredible energy, seized the nest with her beak, and, rather than see her little ones surrendered to the cruel clutches of the enemy, threw it from the height, sending them all to their death at one stroke. She herself fell on the roof and was despatched by the bird of prey. This wonderful spectacle of

attack and defence filled the onlookers with astonishment. "What a family tragedy!" exclaimed the Grand-Duke, "no real battle could have been more vivid and exciting."

Next morning they started very early, so as to reach Étupes in time for dinner, and eagerly the Grand-Duchess looked out for the familiar landmarks as she drew near her home, pointing them out to her husband, her eyes sparkling with excitement. Soon the mother and daughter were locked in each other's arms.

When they arrived at the Castle the good Madame Hendel was making Court curtsies in her flame-coloured dress at the foot of the great staircase. The Grand-Duke politely asked if her costume was intended for an *auto-da-fé*.

"I do not understand Latin, your Imperial Highness," she replied, with many reverences, and explained that the dress was one she wore for weddings and great functions. The Comtesse du Nord had brought many presents for her, and indeed none of the retainers or humble friends of her youth had been forgotten.

The very presence of the Imperial couple intoxicated the faithful housekeeper. She had bought a map of Russia, and whenever she had a moment to spare she would rush up to it, and, passing her finger round it, would exclaim, "One day she will be mistress of all this!"

The joy that Marie Feodorowna experienced on thus returning to the home of her childhood compensated her for much that had been painful or unpleasant in her past life. Once more she became Princess Dorothea. Every morning Madame Hendel presented herself very early in the Grand-Duchess's room, and the latter would encourage her to chatter like a magpie, and tell her all the gossip of the Principality. There was not a marriage or a death, a love affair or a scandal, with which the good lady was not acquainted.

One delightful month was spent at Étupes—one long round of pleasure. Walks and drives, music and dancing filled up the happy hours. Marie Feodorowna was proud to show to the little Court the husband she adored, and by whom she was worshipped. He had his faults, who has not? He was hot-tempered at times, but not unreasonable. He soon forgot his anger. Away from the irritation and annoyance of his life in Russia, he was like another person. If anything, he was too susceptible and kind-hearted, but in all that touched his wife he was tender to a degree. She was the one woman in the world for him.

On August 28th they received a letter from St. Petersburg with the account of the inauguration of the monument to Peter the Great. This

equestrian statue was the work of M. Falconnet, and had been placed in the great square between the Palace of the Senators, and the bridge over the Neva. The Czarina presided at the ceremony, which she witnessed from the balcony of the Senate House, having arrived at the square with all her suite in the State barge. The statue is placed on a granite block composed of a single piece 44 ft. long and 34 ft. wide. This huge piece of stone had been found in the marshes of Karélie. It was incrusted with agates, and amethysts, and other precious stones. Peter is represented urging his horse up the steep side—an allegory which all could understand. A serpent, emblem of prudence, is placed at the feet of the horse. This also is significant.

While this letter was being read aloud the Comte du Nord looked meaningly at Madame d'Oberkirch, and laid his finger on his lips. Though he affected to smile, his face was pale as death.

On September 8th a monument was erected at Étupes as a memorial of the Grand-Duke's visit, and all the children of the Prince and Princess of Montbéliard met together for the ceremony of inauguration. It was made in the form of a little altar, very simple, of pure white marble. That day the monument itself was hardly visible for the roses with which it was smothered.

On the stone were engraved the following lines, composed by the Chevalier de Florian:

Ici la plus heureuse, la plus tendre mère,
Reunit onze enfants, idoles de son cœur,
Et voulut consacrer cette époque si chère,
De son amour, de son bonheur.
Passant, repos toi sous cet épais ombrage,
Et si tu cheris tes enfants,
Respire ici quelques instants
Tu les aimeras d'avantage.

As Marie Feodorowna's uncle, the reigning Duke, resided near Stuttgard, it was thought advisable that after a short stay at Strasburg, they should pay him a visit without waiting for the actual day of departure. Accompanied by her parents, the Grand-Duchess and her husband therefore left for Étupes on September 17th.

The House of Wurtemberg was greatly beloved by its subjects, so the visit was made a reason for rejoicings. The town of Stuttgard received the Imperial visitors with every honour. The thunder from the batteries and the acclamations of the populace filled the air. The Grand-Duke was carried in triumph by the excited crowd, and the city and the palace were illuminated. There was no sleep for any one that night.

Duke Charles had spent his youth in a very dissipated manner, and squandered his affections among numerous mistresses, till at last his fickle heart was captured by a lady of high birth and

great beauty, *la belle Francisca*. To her he surrendered himself, and for the rest of his life she retained an immense influence over him, which was only for good.

From having been a mere man of pleasure he now devoted himself to the good of his people. He had spent large sums of money in folly, but now he was persuaded to restrict his expenditure within reasonable limits. In fact, he became one of the best as well as one of the most charming of princes. The Duchess his wife having died in 1780, he was desirous to marry the lady of his heart, on whom he had conferred the title of Countess of Hohenheim, which was the name of one of his castles near Stuttgard, but reasons of State barred this union, which would otherwise have received universal approbation. Many persons maintained that they were already secretly married. Her uncle, having invited Marie Feodorowna and her husband to visit him in his country home, they followed their own inclinations as well as the wish of the Court, when they frankly accepted the invitation to Hohenheim.

At that time the Countess was thirty-four years of age, and she was reckoned one of the cleverest women in Germany. She wished to make of Stuttgard a second Athens. Although twenty years younger than the Duke, she loved him with a sincere and disinterested affection, and

four years later became his legal wife. She received his guests with most perfect courtesy and tact, for she had the art of knowing her own place, while preserving that of others, and while showing due appreciation of the honour bestowed on her, received the attentions as if they were her due.

The weather was unfortunately very wet, and the Duke was greatly disappointed at not being able to show off his beautiful place, of which he was very proud. His niece perceiving this, said to him, when bidding good-bye, "Dear Uncle, we will come again another day."

He looked tenderly at her and replied, "You are as good as you are beautiful, my dear Niece, and have as much kindness of heart as you have good sense," for he had been much gratified by the visit. He at once ordered a big ball to be given at Stuttgard in honour of the Russian Court.

The Grand-Duchess appeared at this in a most charming dress, the latest creation of Mdlle. Bertin, and M. Leonard, Marie Antoinette's hairdresser, sent a special headdress of his own invention. The Duke lavished every possible attention on his niece, and showed her everything worth seeing, both in his palace and in the town. These were mostly proofs of his former extravagances, such as the Temple of Apollo, a wonderful hall full of

frescoes, with a magnificent fountain in the centre of it, also the famous stable for three hundred horses.

"I repent, Madame, I repent," he said, "these are tokens of the follies of my youth, when I was led away, and thought only of myself and not of my people. Now I no longer build palaces, but hospitals."

The Comte du Nord, who overheard this remark, replied, "Monsieur, it is not such folly to build palaces as you would have us believe. After all, the grandeur of princes tends to the elevation of their subjects, and all the money you have spent on your capital has not been wasted, for it has given work and procured comforts for many."

"You are both right in your views," said the Grand-Duchess, smiling.

One last *fête* was given in her honour, but the time of departure had drawn too near. The Comtesse du Nord had wept nearly all day, and after the supper a melancholy scene took place, when the poor Princess of Montbéliard broke down altogether. Their sobs were heartrending, and Lanele led the Grand-Duchess away, and remained with her all night, and they mingled their tears together.

It was on September 27th, a mournful autumn day, that the mother and daughter parted never to meet again. The Prince de Montbéliard and

the Grand-Duke were hardly less affected. Once more she was torn from that dear mother's arms, just as when an innocent young girl she had been taken from home for her betrothal. Paul lifted her tenderly into the carriage.

"Lanele, Lanele," she cried, as the friends clung together in a last embrace, "do not leave my mother."

"We will see them all again, dearest," cried her husband. "Adieu, dear Madame d'Oberkirch, do not fail to come to us in our northern home."

"Adieu, Lanele, adieu!" repeated Marie Feodorowna, as with one supreme effort she smiled to the little group standing at the gate, and then the carriage drove swiftly away.

Lanele, with tears streaming down her cheeks, tried to console the broken-hearted parents.

Tender letters were sent by the travellers from the first halting-place, but those left behind at Etupes, who loved her best, never saw her dear face again.

CHAPTER XI

AMONG the members of the suite who accompanied the Comte and Comtesse du Nord on their prolonged tour through Europe was a young maid-of-honour named Catherine Nelidoff. She was the daughter of a Russian officer of good family but no fortune, and she had been brought up in the calm seclusion of the Convent of Smolna, till she had attained the age of seventeen. This was an establishment for girls of gentle birth but small means, and was one of the many institutions of the kind founded by Catherine II. during her reign, and in which she took a personal interest.

The Empress singled out this young girl, who was full of intelligence and grace, but extremely ill-favoured, and appointed her maid-of-honour to the Grand-Duke's first wife. She was reappointed to the household of the second wife. Marie Feodorowna took but little notice of her. The German origin and French bringing up of the Grand-Duchess, caused her to cling to those of her own people who had accompanied her to her

new home. The Baronne de Benckendorf, the beloved "Tilline" of her youth, was her friend and confidante in Russia, in the absence of her still dearer friend Lanele.

Mdlle. Nelidoff, therefore, though a member of the suite, was hardly noticed and never mentioned, but during the tour that young woman was gaining experience and knowledge in that best of all schools, travel, and a sojourn in far countries and among strange people. It was impossible for Paul's household to be ignorant of the strained relations between him and his mother, nor could they fail to notice the estrangement between the great Court and the small one, which now formed two separate parties.

In spite of the gratitude which Mdlle. Nelidoff felt towards her benefactress Catherine, all her sympathies were with Paul. The chivalry and kind-heartedness of that Prince, his love of virtue and justice, appealed to the heart of this young girl, fresh from her convent, still pure and spiritually minded in the midst of corrupt surroundings. She appreciated the peaceful family life of the young couple, and sought to please them in every way. But the tongue of scandal was soon set wagging, and tales were rife.

The Grand-Duke, by his mother's order, had been completely separated from Prince Alexander Kourakin, the friend of his childhood. Directly

after their return to Russia, Kourakin was made to retire from his place at Court, for no fault unless it was the little matter of the letters to the aide-de-camp, but mainly because of his devotion to Paul.

Another comrade of his youth having died, Paul, without friends or companions, turned to this sympathetic and intelligent woman whom he had known for years, and whose society was both agreeable and elevating.

The Grand-Duchess seems to have treated the situation as quite natural, but no doubt jealousy was provoked in other quarters, for a rumour began to be circulated through the Court that Catherine Nelidoff was the Grand-Duke's mistress, and that his wife was complaisant enough to countenance his *amours*. That the sentiments which Mdlle. Nelidoff felt for Paul were purely founded on compassion, there is no doubt. And her want of personal attractions made her little likely, in spite of her merits, to inspire a man with a passion. No one, however, with a feeling heart, living in daily intimacy with the Grand-Duke, could fail to wish to render his situation less painful, for every possible slight or indignity which Catherine could offer to her son was heaped upon him.

Paul's fine nature and bright spirits were visibly soured and irritated day by day, and Marie

Feodorowna's heart must have ached for him still more than did that of her maid-of-honour.

That the Grand-Duchess at the bottom of her heart was altogether pleased at the devotion of the lady-in-waiting towards her husband is open to doubt, but her noble nature refused to admit such petty feelings, and besides, her wifely pride must have come to her aid, and persuaded her that she alone had any attractions for him. Her personal beauty, her calm disposition, her brave and loyal character, could not but hold a strong influence for good over her husband, and he treated her ever with the greatest consideration and gratitude.

Still, it must be admitted that Paul found an immense solace in the sparkling conversation and intense sympathy of the fascinating but extremely ugly maid-of-honour. On her part, being of a romantic turn of mind, Mdlle. Nelidoff looked upon it as her mission in life to act as the saviour of the Grand-Duke.

The children of the Imperial couple were not the solace they might have been to their parents, for, as has been already stated, the Czarina took the management of them entirely into her own hands. The year following their return to Russia a little daughter came to gladden the heart of Marie Feodorowna, who was given the name of Alexandra Paulovna. At that time they resided at the Palace of Gatschina.

Catherine treated her son with much outward show of affection, but her suspicious nature would not allow him any part in the Government. The heir to the throne at that time was much loved by the soldiers and the people. More than once those in authority sought to use his influence against Catherine, but he always steadfastly refused to lend himself to any such projects. As long as the children were infants Marie Feodorowna was allowed to have the charge of them, and she must have dreaded seeing her babies grow old enough to be taken from her.

In 1785 her second daughter, Hélène Paulovna, was born, and in the following year yet another little girl was added to the family, and named Marie Paulovna. As the children came in rather rapid succession, and as she suffered greatly in child-bearing, and was often dangerously ill on these occasions, these years must have been passed mostly in the seclusion of her home, where, surrounded by her little ones, she led a happy and peaceful life, striving to remove some of the gloom that was daily increasing on the countenance of Paul.

Catherine was deeply occupied in the work of public instruction, but this did not cause her to neglect the education of her grandchildren. She devoted part of every day to this work. She attended at their lessons and chatted with their teachers. The famous Swiss professor, La Harpe,

who was selected as tutor for the young Grand-Dukes, was a clever literary man, but a pedant.[1] Paul and Marie Feodorowna had not liked him in the days when they met him in Paris; but their advice was not asked in the selection, and there was no doubt he was a very able man.

One morning Catherine entered the study, and, finding the boys absent, amused herself looking at the books on the table. One was lying open, which was evidently the lesson for that day, the subject, the Government of Switzerland. The tutor had treated it very clearly, and had pointed out the advantages of a free country.

The Czarina wrote at the bottom of the page, "M. La Harpe, your sentiments please me greatly, continue to give such lessons."

When the little girls were old enough they were placed in charge of the widow of General Lieven, a woman of much judgment and intelligence.[2]

What must have been very galling to the Grand-Duke was the fact that he was given no authority. Though styled Generalissimo of the Russian Forces, he never led a regiment to battle, and though Admiral of the Baltic Fleet, was not

[1] M. La Harpe was very vain and arrogant, and was consequently the subject of many satirical remarks and uncomplimentary verses, one of which was as follows:

"Non! La Harpe au serpent n'a jamais ressemblé,
Le serpent siffle—et La Harpe est sifflé!"

[2] One of Madame de Lieven's sons was afterwards Prince de Lievèn and Ambassador in London.

even allowed to inspect the ships at Cronstadt. He had a burning desire to distinguish himself at the head of the army, and when war was declared with the Turks in 1788 he begged earnestly to be allowed to join. "All Europe," he wrote to his mother, "knows of my desire to fight the Ottomans. What then will be said, when they see I am prevented from doing so?"

The Czarina replied in these words, "All Europe will say that the Grand-Duke is an obedient son." She allowed him, however, shortly afterwards to go with the army to Finland, though she would not give him any special command.

In her anxiety and grief at this, their first separation, Marie Feodorowna turned to her Russian maid-of-honour for solace and companionship.

Some of the counsellors and friends of the Grand-Duchess deplored the too great influence of Mdlle. Nelidoff. This woman's personality must have been very great. She was less of an intriguer than a romantic idealist, and she became an immense help and comfort to her Imperial mistress. Marie Feodorowna needed her aid all the more that at this crisis she was again about to become a mother, and during Paul's absence at the war she gave birth to a fourth daughter, who received the names of Catherine Paulovna.

In 1790 St. Petersburg was considered one of the most beautiful capitals in Europe. It was

Peter the Great who laid the foundations in 1703, and it was one of his many strokes of genius choosing such a daring position. The city floats like a huge barge in the immense body of water formed by the Neva and its tributaries, thus bringing it into contact with the trade of the world. As Peter himself said, he wished to have a window looking out into Europe.

In all big cities now, the ever-increasing suburbs have completely spoilt the environs. St. Petersburg has not escaped that blemish, but then, the road leading from Peterhoff into the town was a most beautiful one. Lovely country houses standing in charming gardens lined the way. All this ground was originally a swamp, but when it was drained for the purpose of building, the water had been cleverly drawn away, so as to form ornamental ponds and streams, with which to adorn these little parks. Unfortunately, however, the designers could not prevent the thick mist which rose from the earth at sunset in a regular fog, and made this beautiful spot a most unwholesome one. The city itself was magnificent, full of fine public buildings and palaces of the nobles. Many of these were in the principal street, which bore the name of "Perspective," as it does to this day. It is nearly a mile long. The beautiful Neva flows straight through the city, a stately river, bearing on its bosom a ceaseless stream of big vessels and barges.

The granite quays along its banks were built by Catherine, as a protection when the river was in flood, they are an added beauty to the town. The houses were immense, four and five stories, but built with great regularity. The public buildings were many of them in the style of ancient temples. These lined the quays, their mighty proportions being reflected in the limpid waters.

The Russians were a simple people of an unattractive and rugged exterior. They were frugal in their habits, living on potatoes and black bread steeped in oil, and drinking the national beverage called kwass. This was a strong spirit made from grain, but they made no abuse of it, and were not habitual drunkards. In spite of their poor fare, the peasants were a cheerful race on the whole. Their one luxury was the steaming hot bath, in which the whole nation indulged on Saturday nights. Crime was rare, and the petty vice of theft uncommon. Russian ladies would leave their jewels lying about and their houses unguarded, and would consider an image of St. Nicholas or of the Virgin, quite sufficient protection from evil-doers.

To the Russians an image or a little child was a sacred thing, and enough to stop them from committing any ill-deed, and though barbarous as a race they were gentle by nature, and bore the slavery which was their lot in those

days most uncomplainingly. The manners of the upper and middle classes greatly resembled those of the East. Women wore a sheet or veil over their whole costume when going abroad, as is done in Constantinople, and ladies would clap their hands to call their servants, another Eastern habit. They even went so far as to insist on their female slaves sleeping under their beds like dogs, in case of their services being required in the night. Wherever slavery has been practised it has of course always led to acts of injustice and cruelty.

A story is told of one of the ladies of the former Court, who had a sort of dark cage in a corner of her bedroom, in which lived the slave who served her as hairdresser. She let him out every day as she would have taken a comb from her drawer, that he might dress her hair, generally rewarding his services with blows. The unhappy wretch never saw daylight except when adorning the head of his old jailor. He was carried in his box to the country when the family went out of town, and she and her husband endured his company, and the sound of his moans in their room, for three years, in order that the world might be deceived, and no one discover that this high-born lady wore a wig! He was eighteen years old when he was first submitted to this treatment, and when once more restored to liberty,

at the death of his tyrant, he was bent and worn like an old man.

Whether such stories were true or not it is hard to say now, but there is no question that the manners, and customs, and morals, in Russia at that period were worthy of the Middle Ages.

When the Comte de Segur was sent on a five years' mission to the Court of St. Petersburg, he denied these stories of cruelty and tyranny. He declared that though the peasants were slaves, they were treated with great kindness. Beggars were unknown. Every noble was bound to provide for all his people.

Before criticising with too much bitterness abuses in foreign countries (wrote the Count in his Memoirs) we should look back prudently at our own country, where we find usages as deplorable and ridiculous as those that shock us elsewhere. Think of the Austrians, and Prussians, the Spaniards in the Inquisition, the French at Cayenne, and the Bastile, the English with their press-gangs and other cruelties, practised even in these enlightened days.

To us those days seem very far from being enlightened. It was a cruel world—then and for many years after. Many deeds of cruelty were practised then in our own country under the names of law and justice, but Russia was such a vast country that many parts of it were rude and savage, and with the terrible system of serfage, human life

was held to be of but little account. As to the nobles, they lived with the same grandeur and reckless extravagance, as did those under the *ancien régime* in France.

The chief personage in St. Petersburg at that date was Count Strogonoff, whose house stood ever open, and where strangers were most hospitably entertained.

Besides his town house, he had a most lovely Italian villa at Kameni-Ostrov in the outskirts, where he gave dinner parties to his friends every Sunday. The grounds were immense, and laid out in English fashion, they extended to the banks of the Neva, and his guests generally arrived by water. The park was of great dimensions, and the Count used to allow a sort of fair to be held there on Sundays for the amusement of his visitors and dependants. An immense covered terrace supported by columns overlooked the river, here dinner was served, with a profusion of fruit and every costly luxury, while a band played softly during the repast on wind instruments, each musician playing one note only. The effect was marvellous. The evening would be concluded by a fine display of fireworks, the many-coloured lights and brilliant effect being reflected in the Neva, while dances in costume were performed for the entertainment of the company.

The house of Count Strogonoff was far from

being the only one so magnificently appointed. These lavish banquets were greatly in vogue. The fortunes of the nobles were so colossal as to enable them to keep open house, which was their chief pleasure. Prince Narischkin, the Master of the Horse, had a table laid for twenty-five or thirty persons daily.

These habits of hospitality extended into the interior, where modern civilisation had not penetrated. The great families when travelling put up at the houses, not necessarily of friends, but at those which were the most convenient as halting-places. Here they expected to be taken in, with their wives and children and hosts of retainers, being willing to offer the same hospitality themselves to others. And all this in the most natural manner possible, refusing even thanks, and treating it as the most ordinary thing in the world.

The Court of the Grand-Duke resided in summer at Gatschina, where they held frequent parties, and persons invited were entertained for several days together. They treated their guests with the greatest politeness and kindness, causing them to feel quite at their ease, and almost making them forget the exalted rank of their hosts. Marie Feodorowna moved among her guests with the same charm and courtesy, which are exercised to-day in England, by the royal lady who reigns over the hearts and affections of her subjects.

Such courtesy, and such gracious manners, had never been experienced in Russia before. Home parties were unheard of in the Court of Catherine. State ceremonials to which the nobles were bidden, and which they dare not decline, were all the hospitality offered by their Sovereign.

Of course, everything that occurred at Gatschina was reported to Tzarskoë-Selo, which hardly tended to improve matters between the Imperial palaces, and the jealous heart of the Czarina must have been daily provoked, as she witnessed or was told of the successes of her beautiful daughter-in-law. Not that she had any personal dislike to Marie Feodorowna. When the Prince de Ligne, who was an immense favourite of Catherine, came and stayed at St. Petersburg, he particularly noticed the manner in which the Grand-Duchess behaved to the Empress, and he used to reproach Paul for not treating his mother in the same way.

"See, Monseigneur," he would say, "the pleasure that the Grand-Duchess, who is an angel, gives to the Czarina, when she answers her with that winning manner for which she is so truly beloved, while when you speak to your mother, you put on the manner of a courtier in disgrace, you harden her heart all the more."

He used also to reproach the Empress for not drawing her son more closely to her. But it was all no good, Paul could not forget or forgive—and

indeed we can hardly blame him, seeing what he had suffered at her hands.

When the Grand-Duke paid his memorable visit to France it was in the early spring, when the winds are generally cold, and he used to say, "At St. Petersburg we *see* the cold, here we *feel* it," and Russians have been heard to remark, "We must go and pass a winter in Russia to get warm again." The intense cold there, is less felt indoors than the more moderate temperature of winter in other countries. Their system of stoves keeps the houses like ovens, and so many precautions are taken, and such rich furs and coverings are worn, that the wealthy, at any rate, do not suffer from it. As to the common people, it does not seem to affect them disastrously. They live to a very great age in Russia, and are strong and vigorous as a rule, but all the same their sufferings in winter must often be great.

The Comte de Segur left so many impressions of people and things during his stay in Russia, that we are indebted to him for many details of life at that Court, as well as descriptions of the habits of the country. He accompanied the Empress on her famous tour of inspection in the Crimea, when that province had been finally annexed. He always kept in the good graces of the famous Czarina, but he preferred the society of the little Court. He gives a graphic account

of the Grand-Duke Paul and his family. He found their society charming, their household managed with grace and simplicity, and yet in perfect keeping with their rank. Marie Feodorowna he describes as being affable and natural, beautiful without coquetry, and yet with the majesty of a great Princess. Paul he thought very clever, with a noble character. In any other rank and in any other country Paul might have been a happy man, and a cause of happiness to others. A short observation of the Grand-Duke convinced Segur that his too great susceptibility was rapidly bringing a sense of mistrust and unrest, which led to the eccentricities which were the cause of all his final misfortunes. With such characteristics he was little fitted for a throne, and above all such a throne as that of Russia. Owing to his mother's treatment, he was not trained like other heirs-apparent to the duties of a monarch, and when he reached the summit his downfall was inevitable. He grew more gloomy year by year under this tyranny, and Marie Feodorowna saw with dismay and grief, the once lovable nature of her husband changing before her very eyes.

Meanwhile the rumours and slanders of the Court had reached the ears of Mdlle. Nelidoff, and poisoned her very existence. In spite of her love for her Imperial master and mistress, she determined to leave them, and obtained

permission to throw up her appointment at Court and retire to the Convent of Smolna. She left the scenes of her former triumph with relief, for latterly, at any rate, she had had more sorrow than joy. She did not, however, cut herself off entirely from her former relations with the Grand-Duchess, and the following year she received an invitation to Pavlovsk.

To the surprise of those who scented a scandal, and hoped to prove their suspicions were correct, Marie Feodorowna received her with every appearance of pleasure. She had realised that through Mdlle. Nelidoff alone, could she influence Paul aright and save him from himself, and with a wisdom and discretion granted to few she took the former maid-of-honour into her confidence and friendship, and together from that hour they worked for the well-being of Paul, whom each in her own way loved so devotedly.

The horrors of the French Revolution preyed upon Paul's mind. A fear of a similar state of things in Russia seized upon him. He followed the account of the misfortune of his royal friend with deep interest, haunted ever by a vision of the fate of Louis XVI. overtaking himself.

Marie Feodorowna was not without sorrows also, for while mourning over the fate of the unhappy Marie Antoinette, her heart was filled with anxiety for her beloved Lanele.

They had never ceased to exchange constant letters full of affection, telling each other all their most private concerns, and the news from France, gradually getting more and more distressing, flowed as of old from Lanele's facile pen.

Marie Feodorowna was most anxious that her friends should emigrate, but the Báron and Baronne d'Oberkirch were among those who refused to do so.

The Grand-Duchess, on the eve of her confinement, wrote an agonised letter to Lanele, imploring her not to remain in Strasburg and expose herself to the dangers that threatened her.

You shall have news of my confinement, dearest (she writes), the instant it takes place. I am fairly well, though suffering from the excessive heat. I have good news from Tilline, whose husband has recovered from his dangerous illness, but I can think of nothing but the news from Paris, it makes me shudder. Ah! why do you expose yourself unnecessarily? In your place, I know I should fly.

The expected child was born in July, the little Grand-Duchess Olga, but she only lived to gladden her mother's heart for two short years. She was the only child of that large family who died in infancy.

Alsace did not escape the tyranny of the revolution, and M. d'Oberkirch was imprisoned at Schlestadt and shortly after Madame d'Oberkirch

was likewise incarcerated at Andlau, but as her daughter Marie was allowed to share her captivity, it could not have been a very severe one. The Grand-Duchess managed to send a letter, though she was careful to put no signature. It contained a few words of loving sympathy which must have been balm to the heart of Lanele.

At the fall of Robespierre both she and her husband were released, so they had reason to be thankful at having passed through that terrible ordeal so easily, although they had spent a considerable time in captivity, for they were not set at liberty till 1794. That same year the reigning Duke of Wurtemberg, Charles Eugene, died. The Grand-Duchess, who had always been fond of her uncle, mourned his loss sincerely.

CHAPTER XII

IN 1793 a marriage was arranged for the proximate heir to the throne, the Grand-Duke Alexander, and Princess Louise of Baden. It is needless to say the negotiations were entirely the work of the Czarina, who did not allow his parents to have any voice in the matter. Such was her desire to be a great-grandmother, that she hurried on the marriage while Alexander was a mere boy. The young bride was given the name of Elizabeth Alexievna. This premature union remained for long a childless one. In after years two infant daughters were born, only to die in their cradles.

Elizabeth proved an excellent wife, she was a beautiful girl, and her natural gifts endeared her to the country of her adoption. The young couple were given one of the palaces for a residence, but on account of their extreme youth they took no part in the affairs of the country. A tender love existed between the Grand-Duchess and her first-born, and doubtless her pretty, gentle daughter-in-law was a source of pleasure to her.

In 1794 Paul and his wife mourned the loss of

the little baby Olga, but another little girl was added to their family that same year, and named Anna Paulovna.

Catherine also insisted on the marriage of Constantine, but had more difficulty in finding him a wife. His temper was brutal, and his habits far from desirable, and he rudely rejected any of the Princesses offered to him by his grandmother. He eventually married a Princess of Saxe-Coburg, a young girl of great merit, who was a thousand times too good for him, and who certainly deserved a better fate. This marriage was also a childless one.

Catherine generally resided at Tzarskoë-Selo, unless affairs of State obliged her to go into St. Petersburg. She loved the place, and had made endless improvements there. In a letter to the Prince de Ligne, written the year before her death, she said:

I know your idea is that Tzarskoë-Selo is in a fair way to possess all my heart. I own that I love this place, and have lately made a gentle slope which leads down to the colonnade at the bottom of the garden, also an open rotunda supported by thirty-two columns of Siberian marble. I want to see my grandsons, and their wives and their children when they have them, running on the grass of that slope.

Her wish as regards the grandchildren she did not live to see gratified. The whole place was most beautifully kept, a thousand workmen were

employed in the grounds alone. The park, which was of vast extent, contained a lake of considerable size, the depth of which was sufficient to float large yachts. The home farm was a model building in the Dutch style, the walls lined with blue faïence. The Czarina's apartments were magnificent, the floors inlaid with mother-of-pearl and precious woods, the walls ornamented with lapis lazuli and porphyry.

In 1796, peace having been concluded with Sweden, Catherine was determined to bring about an alliance which would further consolidate this union. Her dream was to marry one of the young Grand-Duchesses to Gustavus-Adolphus, the King, and Alexandra Paulovna was brought up to believe that some day she would reign over the kingdom of Sweden.

One day the Czarina opened a portfolio and showed her granddaughter a number of portraits of marriageable princes, and asked her to choose one. With blushing countenance the Princess pointed out that of the young man of whom she had been told so many things.

Catherine, ignoring the fact that Alexandra could read, and that the name was written on the picture, declared it was the finger of fate. The King of Sweden was therefore invited on a visit, and arrived with his uncle and a numerous suite. This was in August, 1796.

Catherine left her country palace, and came in great state to the Hermitage to receive him, bringing the Grand-Duchess Alexandra with her. The interview between the young couple was somewhat embarrassing. She was only fourteen years of age, but tall, and with a womanly figure. Her features were regular, and her face calm and serene as that of her mother, from whom she also inherited a noble carriage.

Gustavus-Adolphus was seventeen years of age, also tall, and very free from the awkwardness usual at that age. It would have been hard to find a young man better brought up, and with more promise for the future than the Prince of Sweden. All the pomp and splendour of which the Russian Court was capable, were displayed before him, but he seemed in no way dazzled. He appeared far more at his ease, and was much better mannered than the Grand-Dukes, who were very rough and unpolished, and comparisons far from flattering were made in favour of the Swedish Monarch. The coarse tricks, and rough horse-play, indulged in by Constantine, annoyed the Empress so much that she had him twice put under arrest during the royal visit.

The young lovers were given every opportunity to converse together at the balls and *fêtes*. Already they were becoming familiar in their intercourse, and visibly pleased with each other. No secret

was made of the coming marriage, and only one obstacle existed, and that was the question of religion. Catherine, who knew well what the feeling in her Court was about it, asked the Archbishop if it was possible for her granddaughter to abjure her faith. Instead of answering in the affirmative, as she had hoped, he replied, "Your Majesty is all-powerful."

This annoyed the Czarina greatly, but her heart was set on this scheme, and she was determined to put her scruples aside. That Catherine should have scruples at all was a surprise, and the King of Sweden willingly agreed that his bride should not be called upon formally to abjure her faith.

The day of the betrothal was fixed for September 21st, and the ceremony was to take place in the evening. Orders were given for a gala assembly in the throne-room. The young Grand-Duchess arrived dressed in white, and followed by her sisters, and the Grand-Dukes and their wives. Paul and Marie Feodorowna arrived from Gatschina to be present, and the Empress appeared last of all, and entered the room with great state. Only the bridegroom was missing! Prince Zouboff the Minister, went backwards and forwards. Whispers were heard round the hall, "What can it be?" "The King has fallen ill." "How can he dare to keep the Czarina waiting?" Yet still he did not come.

This was what had occurred: At seven o'clock in the evening Prince Markoff, the Ambassador, had taken the contract for Gustavus to read, and the King was much surprised to find clauses inserted of which no former mention had been made. One was, that his future Queen should have a chapel and clergy of her own. This the young Monarch at once declared was impossible. He did not wish to thwart the Princess's conscience in any way, but a chapel and clergy of another religion in his palace were impossibilities. Markoff was dreadfully taken aback. He told the King that they were awaiting him in the throne-room, and that any refusal at this stage, would be offering a deadly affront, not only to the bride, but to the Court of Russia.

Besborodko and others gathered round him begging him to reconsider his decision, but Gustavus only replied in a loud voice, "No, no! I will not! I cannot sign this paper," and nothing could alter his determination.

That this mere child had the audacity to refuse the behests of the great Catherine, filled the Russian Ministers with astonishment, and they knew not how to break the news to their mistress. Prince Zouboff returned once more to the throne-room and whispered into Catherine's ear. Pale and trembling, the Empress rose, astonishment depicted on her countenance, and with stammering

lips she tried to answer him. The blood was mounting to her head, forerunner of the attack which was so soon to prove fatal. A faintness came over her, and she allowed herself to be led away.

Alexandra, nearly as much overcome as her grandmother, when the news was broken to her, was conveyed to her apartments, where she abandoned herself to floods of tears, and refused to see any one but her governess. The courtiers were promptly dismissed and the assembly broken up.

The following day being the birthday of Anne Feodorowna, the wife of Constantine, Court etiquette required that a ball should take place. The King of Sweden appeared at it, but Catherine, who was also present, turned her back upon him. Embarrassment was written on every face. Alexandra refused to come down, and remained in her room, conscious that her name was on every one's lips. Gustavus danced a little, spoke a few words to the Grand-Duke Alexander, and went away bowing politely. The rest of the *fêtes* in his honour became dreary festivals, and never did a poor young sovereign pass such a miserable time. Most of the company feigned illness, and did not turn up. The Czarina was obliged to grant the King one or two more audiences, but they were purely on business, and she departed to her palace at Tauride, while he

was still in St. Petersburg, and shut herself up under the pretence of celebrating some religious anniversary.

Gustavus left the very day of the Grand-Duke Paul's birthday, a week after the rupture. He left behind him a great deal of ill-humour in the heart of Catherine, and a great deal of sorrow in that of Alexandra. Little mention was made of Paul during this incident, for the reason that he was never consulted in matters regarding his children, even less than in matters connected with the State. He was living at Gatschina during the King of Sweden's visit, which lasted six weeks, and only appeared twice at St. Petersburg during that time. Marie Feodorowna, on the contrary, went there three or four times a week. It was a most fatiguing and tiresome journey, but at least it made it appear as if she assumed the duties and rights of a mother, though they were in reality denied her. "If all my daughters are as difficult to marry as Alexandra," she observed, "I shall not live to see them married."[1]

Directly after the birth of their third son, Nicholas, in the course of that autumn, Catherine approached her daughter-in-law on the subject of disinheriting Paul in favour of his eldest son Alexander. This scheming woman, utterly without

[1] Gustavus Adolphus afterwards married Princess Frederick of Baden, but this turned out a most unhappy union.

remorse for the treatment to which she had subjected her own husband, now wished to deal in a similar manner with her son.

This proposal Marie Feodorowna met with the scorn it deserved, but even her determined refusal did not put an end to Catherine's schemes. Her next proposal went even further, and included his imprisonment in the fortress of Lode. Marie Feodorowna might have acquainted her husband with these machinations which his mother was trying to work secretly against him, but she did not dare to do so, for his anger might have amounted almost to frenzy. She must by now have been fully aware of the deterioration of the character of the man she had loved so tenderly in her youth.

It was in the bitter cold of a winter night at the close of the year, that the end came to the great Empress, and to all her intrigues and caprices. She was struck down by a sudden seizure, and was found by one of her ladies unconscious on the floor. An alarm was given, and the whole palace was soon filled with confusion. Life was not extinct, her pulse beat feebly, and there was still hope of bringing her round.

The Grand-Duke Paul, who was at Gatschina, was hastily summoned. Though mother and son had long been on the worst possible terms, yet as he approached the deathbed, the feelings of filial

affection so long repressed regained their sway, and he burst into tears as he kissed the hand of the unconscious Czarina. But the knowledge of even this tardy return to allegiance was denied her, the great sovereign had practically passed away. Heavy laboured breathing was all the sign of life that was left. Then suddenly a horrible cry issued from the pallid lips, and she fell back dead, and it was that note of agony, which announced to all within hearing, that Paul was now Emperor of Russia, and that she had fallen from the throne where she had reigned for so long.

It was Marie Feodorowna who first broke the solemn silence that ensued, and, surrounded by her children, fell at Paul's feet and rendered him homage as Czar.

If within the Palace there was a measure of relief, which under the circumstances was hardly unnatural, weeping and lamentation without rent the air, on this the first day of Paul's reign—a melancholy augury for the future.

Such were the feelings of the populace towards their wonderful sovereign, and such was their grief, that grave fears were entertained that a revolution might ensue. The lying-in-state lasted six days, and all the members of the Court, and of the nobility, were allowed to pass before the corpse, and kiss the waxen fingers of the dead Czarina.

The Emperor Paul's first act was to order the exhumation of the body of his father, Peter III., who for thirty-five years had lain at rest in the convent of Alexander-Newski. He determined that fitting honours should be offered to the neglected partner of the late Empress's throne.

The Imperial crown was sent for from Moscow, and laid on the coffin, which was placed beside that of Catherine for the lying-in-state. A ribbon, extended from one to the other, bore on it in letters of gold the following inscription in Russian: "Divided during their lives, they are reunited in death."

Such of the murderers of Peter as were still living, were compelled to carry the pall of the late Emperor. Alexis Orloff was sent for from his country seat, and he and Prince Bariatinsky were ordered to stand beside the coffin of Peter III. This was doubtless done with the intention of striking terror into the hearts of these two men, they being generally supposed to have been Peter's murderers.

The new Czar and his wife, and the whole Court, followed on foot, bareheaded, the ladies with long black veils. It was bitterly cold, and they had to walk through the snow from the palace to the fortress, the burying-place of the emperors of Russia.

The ceremony lasted three hours, during which

the eyes of all the spectators were fastened upon the two pall-bearers, as if silently reproaching them for their crime. Alexis Orloff, though an old man, was stronger in body and mind than his companion. He was a giant in stature, and, having little or no sensibility, showed no signs of emotion. But Bariatinsky was in a state of profound grief, and without the help of restoratives from time to time would have fainted away.

All St. Petersburg waited expectantly to see what punishment would follow this exhibition, but the new Czar's vengeance stopped there. Without having even to ask leave to depart, Orloff was ordered to leave the Court for ever, and shortly after the same decree was passed on Prince Bariatinsky. If this was intended as a disgrace both the culprits must have looked on it as a specially lenient form of it.

Catherine was sixty-seven years of age at the time of her death. She still had retained much of her former beauty. Her hair was magnificent, and up to the end she wore it dressed round her head in regal plaits like a crown. Her immense size was due to dropsy, but till that malady afflicted her, she had kept her fine figure unimpaired by age. Her reign had undoubtedly been a brilliant and happy one, and great as were her personal faults, it was a beneficial one for the nation.

I know (wrote Voltaire at the time of her death) that the great Catherine of Russia was reproached by many for her conduct. There were some trifles connected with her husband, but these are family matters with which I do not meddle.

During her reign of thirty-four years, she had organised everything that she thought would be useful to her people and likely to enhance the greatness of the State. In memory of the husband she had treated so badly, she caused two hundred and thirty-seven towns to be built of stone, to replace the old villages of wooden houses which were the cause of so many terrible fires. She founded banks, and encouraged manufactories in the great centres, and endowed schools in every town and village throughout Russia. A great system of canals was carried out under her orders, and the code of laws was completely revised. She introduced inoculation into Russia, taking example by that public-spirited woman Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who brought the same valuable remedy into England. One of her works was the Institute of Smolna, where Catherine Nelidoff was brought up. The Czarina took a deep interest in this school, where four hundred and eighty young girls were educated under the direction of a Frenchwoman, Madame Lafond.

We want them to be neither prudes nor coquettes (wrote the Empress to Voltaire), French

and other accomplishments are taught them there, but the line between pupils of noble birth and tradesmen's daughters must be sharply drawn.

She was also a great patron of art and literature. She ordered copies to be made of the famous frescoes in the Vatican, to adorn the walls of the Hermitage, and the Academy of Art was filled with models of sculptures, and copies of paintings, from the old masters. All these things were done by Catherine alone—she was much too masterful to be dictated to by others. In private life her habits were simple, and she was kindly to those about her, and her grandchildren she loved very dearly, but with all these excellent qualities she continued to the very last the same implacable behaviour towards her son.

CHAPTER XIII

PAUL was forty-two years of age when he ascended the throne of Russia, and he felt as if time would not suffice for all he wished and meant to do for his kingdom. Far from wishing to imitate the conduct of his mother, his first care was to put his son's establishments on a proper footing. He made each of them colonel of a regiment, and Alexander was, besides, appointed Military Governor of St. Petersburg. This was a very important post, at the same time it enabled the Czar to keep the young Prince under his eye.

To his beloved Consort he assigned large revenues, to the surprise and delight of every one, and he gave a liberal allowance for the maintenance of his younger children. As the neglected heir-apparent, he and his wife had suffered so cruelly from want of means, and want of position, that he was determined to do his best that they might all forget the unpleasant past.

The coronation of the new Emperor and Empress took place with great pomp at Moscow, where they repaired for the purpose. Moscow has ever been

dear to the Russian heart from the days when Ivan I. built the original wooden walls of the Kremlin in 1338, and it was hallowed by many centuries of historical association.

In 1812 the Muscovites made the supreme national sacrifice of giving up their ancient city to the flames, a description, therefore, of the old capital as it was at Paul's accession, written by an eye-witness, may be of interest. Whether it was an exact picture, it is hard to say, but it has the merit of coming from the pen of an English lady who visited Russia in the early part of Paul's reign, and she was no doubt the first Englishwoman who recounted her impressions of the cities of Russia at that early date. She was a Miss Wilmot, and spent a summer with the Princess Dasckoff, one of the former ladies of the Court of Catherine, and a person of great wealth and importance.

The view from the top of the highest tower of the Kremlin is most beautiful and extensive and very striking. The armorial bearings of the tributary provinces of the empire decorate its encircling walls, and the Imperial eagle extends its golden wings among the glittering crosses which top its thousand churches. The river, passing like a silver crescent through the town, presents a radiant line of the most vivid animation. Here on its frozen stream, round and round a course marked by green boughs, the fiery horses of Livonia, Tartary, and Arabia, driven by cavaliers

in small shell-like sledges, bound along in dazzling rotation, and let your eye follow if it can the successive groups, which from the top of the elevated ice mountains are hurried to the bottom with a force and rapidity of which flying can alone give an idea.

The remoter part of the river is cut up into trenches, where lines of washerwomen bend over to wring their clothes, unconscious of the cold. Here, too, baskets as large as huts appear above the surface, containing the winter's fish, plunged to a considerable depth beneath, and each proprietor weekly visits his watery prison, provident of his store for impending fasts.

Innumerable circumstances concur in giving Moscow an Asiatic air, beyond any other town in Europe. The cross glitters above the crescent on every tower, symbolising as it were the triumph of Christianity, and mingles among the yellow globes of gold which blaze amidst the sunshine. The gaudy belfries are open to the day, the burnished metal copings, the stupendous palaces guarded by sculptured monsters, the theatres, arches, hospitals, convents, and intervening gardens of great extent, comprehend a mass of varied and splendid imagery peculiar to this ancient city.

Nothing, perhaps, is so extraordinary as the appearance of the churches, whose walls are covered with representations of gigantic saints on a background of radiant gold. Before these daubs of sanctification, thousands of people are seen blessing and prostrating themselves, with an ardour belonging more to idolatry than religion. Their devotions at an end, the men may be seen rising from their knees, and hallooing to their horses, which they have left standing by the way, and, springing on their cars, they continue on their errands.

Beside the usual market carts, there are numbers heaped with blocks of ice, to be conveyed to the cellars of the nobles as provision for the coming summer.

In spite of the luxury and civilisation at St. Petersburg and other places in Russia, Moscow is still in the fourteenth or fifteenth century. Time alone will expand this Imperial realm to the standard of liberty and civilisation of other European countries.

When in August Moscow is blazing in an atmosphere of heat it presents yet a different aspect. It has little resemblance to the same place as it looks under the unclouded skies and brilliant stars, of a northern winter night, when the sparkling snow shines white in the moonlight.

In summer all is a blaze of gold. The yellow rays of perpetual sunshine are reflected from the gilded domes and balls, and spires, with an eternal and almost painful dazzle throughout the livelong day. Flies buzzing, midges poisoning, and mosquitoes incessantly worrying drive the wretched inhabitants almost to madness, and added to all this the clanging of bells produces a state of torment which can hardly be described.

But the summer heats with their varied ills were over before the coronation, which did not take place till October 12th, and amid the acclamations of his subjects Paul mounted that throne from which he had been so unjustly deprived.

The Empress was at that time in the zenith of her beauty. She was very tall, and had lovely blonde hair falling in curls on her shoulders. She was in striking contrast with her husband, and

towered majestically above him when taking his arm. Her nature was as fine as her person, and her virtues were so well known that the tongue of calumny never assailed her. Her portrait was painted by Madame Vigée le Brun, the great French artist, who made a prolonged stay in Russia. The Czarina was represented in her Court robes and crown of diamonds, against a background of crimson velvet. She is there depicted as an exceedingly beautiful woman, and, though somewhat stout, had preserved her youthful freshness. Her young daughters, the Grand-Duchesses Alexandra and Hélène, were also painted by Madame Vigée le Brun, who placed the two Princesses in a graceful attitude, the elder with her arm round the younger, and both gazing at a portrait of their mother. They were quite unlike in appearance, though both had very lovely, clear complexions. Alexandra's beauty was of a Greek type, she greatly resembled her elder brother Alexander, who was always much admired, but many people thought that Hélène, the younger of the two, was far the prettier.

Marie Feodorowna was fortunate in her daughter-in-law Elizabeth, who was a welcome addition to their family circle. She and Alexander made a handsome couple, they were very popular on account of their looks and amiable dispositions. Constantine, on the other hand, was remarkably

ugly, and a strange contrast to his brother, but he greatly resembled his father.

Both Paul and his wife were devoted to their children, though no doubt the four elder ones, having been brought up by Catherine, were never quite the same to their mother as the younger ones, and yet between the Czarina and her first-born there ever existed a most tender love.

A great change had come over Paul since the days when as the Comte du Nord he had charmed all France. He had been completely soured by the slights which he had been compelled to bear all these years. There was a touch of Hamlet in Paul I. From his earliest youth the mystery surrounding his father's death had disquieted him. Though still full of intelligence and activity of mind, he had become eccentric almost to the point of mania. His moments of kindness were succeeded by moments of ferocity. Anger would replace benevolence, and caprice take the place of justice.

Had the character of the Czar been composed of Catherine's powers of administration joined to his own noble qualities, he would have been one of the best and greatest, as well as most fortunate, of sovereigns. He had a very high idea of his own authority, and he is supposed to have uttered the famous saying, "Know, that the only person of consideration in Russia is the person

whom I address at the moment that I am addressing him!"

However, Paul's first acts made a good impression on his people. He diminished taxes, which were very unpopular, and pardoned many offenders condemned to lengthy terms of imprisonment by his mother.

With the hope for better things which always fills the soul of a people, all hearts were turned towards the new monarch, but Marie Feodorowna who saw beneath the surface, and by this time knew the real state of her husband's mind, felt that all this was but the calm before the storm. He was in a state of reaction after the tension in which he had lived under Catherine's iron rule.

The Czar was anxious to make up to Mdlle. Nelidoff for any distress that might have been caused her at the time of her retirement from Court, and he made her Directress of the Establishment for the daughters of indigent nobles, and the Czarina, following in the footsteps of her late mother-in-law, visited Smolna almost daily, and was therefore once more in constant communication with the former maid-of-honour.

In his desire to efface every trace of the late reign, Paul dismissed men who had grown grey in the service of the Crown, and replaced them by young and ignorant officials. He manifested

the utmost hatred and contempt for the memory of his mother, and hastened to destroy and change all that she had done. He did not really love the people of Russia, but he wished to do his duty by them. He had once said to the Prince de Ligne, "I tell you, these beggars of Russians want to be governed by a woman, because they think they can get the better of her. That is why they adore my mother. She cannot climb mountains and see the reverse side of things; no woman can fashion everything aright in a great country like this." So in his inmost heart he somewhat despised the people who now were under his sway.

For a time, however, the new Czar ruled over the country in a fairly temperate manner, he also occupied himself greatly in beautifying his capital. He entirely rebuilt the Palace of Michaïloff. It was fortified, being more of a castle than a palace, and was dedicated to the Archangel Michael. Over the principal door was an inscription in old Slavonic language, "On thy house will the blessing of the Lord rest for evermore." He also added to the canals that run through the city. He founded an orphanage for eight hundred children and other charitable institutions.

The completion of the great Cathedral of St. Isaac was a work of this reign. It had been pulled down, and added to, according to the taste

of each of the sovereigns. It was an immense structure, built of huge blocks of Finnish marble, with four *façades*, and a portico supported on pillars of red marble. Though vast, it does not approach St. Peter's of Rome, nor St. Paul's, nor St. Sophia in Constantinople, and it is very dark, owing to the colour of the stone and the smallness of the windows. This edifice was begun in marble, and continued by Paul in brick, which gave rise to the following epigram,

"In this church an emblem is traced of the present reign and the reign that is passed. The one is of brick, the other of stone!"

This so expressed the feelings of many people, that the Czar was justly indignant. An unoffending man was captured by the police (as they had to produce a culprit), and he was charged with being the author of the epigram. With the want of justice and humanity which marked that dark age, the Emperor ordered his tongue to be cut out. But the real author of the insulting words remained unknown.

The defect of Paul's government showed itself in the haste with which he carried out his measures, instead of attaining his object little by little. With a view, as he thought, to allowing the meanest of his subjects an equal chance with that of the influential, of reaching the ear of the Monarch, he established the famous "Yellow Box" at his

palace gate, into which supplications and complaints could be dropped at any hour. This soon filled the hearts of the functionaries with terror. What false complaints might not be lodged there! What plots might be concocted or exposed in this fashion! A general sense of insecurity filled the public mind, and communicated itself to those in office.

Paul was not more happy in his method of dealing with his army. He thought to imitate Frederick the Great by an excessive number of parades and manœuvres, but he only succeeded in irritating his officers by overwork, and the rank and file by the perpetual innovations and the severity of punishments for the smallest offences. In his craze for Prussian practices he abolished the national uniform, which was soldier-like and suited to the climate. The Russian warriors did not recognise themselves with powdered queues and ornamental shoe-buckles.

Old General Souvaroff shook his head and said, "There are powders—and powders. Shoe-buckles are not gun-carriages, nor pigtails bayonets. We are not Prussians, but Russians."

This epigram was punished by the exile of the humorist.

When the anniversary of his mother's death came round, Paul announced his intention of stopping all the usual military demonstrations

expected on such an occasion. This raised the indignation of the veterans of the late army.

Full of misgiving, the Czarina consulted the faithful Catherine Nelidoff, relying on her judgment and discretion, and implored her to prevent the Czar from taking this unwise step. Usually both the devoted women found themselves more or less helpless, but on this occasion Mdlle. Nelidoff succeeded in getting the Emperor to listen to reason, and to reconsider the ill-advised measure.

Into all classes a great fear crept, no one felt sure if the Czar would not take umbrage at something. The gaieties of the capital seemed to be in danger of being suppressed, balls and parties, if held at all, took place behind closed doors, lest they should commit some new and unpardonable offence. For fear of remark, people did not even allow their carriages to stand at the entry.

The nobles were obliged to wear powder in their hair. Once when Prince Bariatinsky was having his portrait painted, and, wishing it done with his hair its natural colour, had left off the powder, the news arrived that the Czar was coming to the studio. Pale as death, the young man had just time enough to save himself by hiding in a cupboard, otherwise Siberia might have been the result.

When Paul found himself sole ruler, and able

at last to carry out his own will, he took pleasure in issuing the most whimsical orders. He forbade the wearing of round hats, and declared they were a sign of Jacobinism, and the police had orders to knock them off the offenders' heads. Foreigners visiting St. Petersburg and ignorant of these rules were righteously indignant at such treatment, the Russians themselves knew better than to object.

Another of his orders was, that every one should salute when passing the palace, whether the Czar was in residence or not, and men and women alike, whatever their rank or position, were obliged to descend from their vehicles and wait by the roadside if they happened to meet the Imperial carriage. No small annoyance in that inclement region! The Emperor disliked most of the leading men in his kingdom, but to strangers, especially to the French, he showed the greatest kindness and hospitality. He had in truth suffered so many insults at the hands of the nobles during his mother's lifetime, as they had sought to curry favour with Catherine by ignoring her son, that he had a good many scores to pay off. But he sometimes punished the innocent with the guilty.

Some of the laws which were remodelled during Paul's reign were beneficial, and Russia owes to him one of its fundamental laws enacting that

the succession to the throne must be in order of primogeniture, and that women should be allowed to reign only in default of male heirs. That the first part of this was put aside we learn in the history of his own sons.

What his poor wife must have suffered in seeing the man she loved, gradually becoming an object of dislike can readily be imagined, and yet judging from her letters at this period she does not seem to have been as unhappy as might be imagined. She saw his errors and mistakes, but she still had much happiness in her life, and the real extent of Paul's unpopularity was probably concealed from her. Indeed, the people found it politic to feign a loyalty and affection which in their hearts they did not feel.

The Czarina wrote almost daily to Catherine Nelidoff, and the letters that have been preserved give much insight into the daily home life of the Empress. They also prove, whatever the world may have said or thought, that Marie Feodorowna considered her late maid-of-honour her best friend. In 1797 she penned the following:

I write to you in the sorrow of my heart, for a letter has just reached me from Berne from the doctor of my poor Tilline. Madame de Benckendorf seemed to have taken a turn for the better, when internal hæmorrhage set in. It grieves me

to the bottom of my heart, and if it is God's will to take from me this friend of my childhood, I shall find it hard to bear.[1]

The little children of the Czarina used to be constantly sent to Smolna to visit Mdlle. Nelidoff, no doubt when business of State or Court prevented their mother being able to attend to them. Annette (the Grand-Duchess Anna) was then just two years old, and Nicholas was a baby of a year old. "Annette is a delightful little creature, and Monsieur Nicholas is a fine child," writes the fond mother on one occasion. Nicholas was handsome from his infancy, and in after life, when he ascended the throne of Russia, he was renowned for his beauty and colossal stature.

Marie Feodorowna was often prevented from attending to her children, as on every occasion that it was possible she accompanied her husband on his tours of inspection. She tried to delude herself into the belief that he was beloved of his people, and that the ovations he received wherever they stopped were a proof of loyalty and affection.

[1] The Baronne de Benckendorf left four children, Alexander and Constantine, Dorothea and Marie. After their mother's death, the little girls were educated at Smolna, and were always under the special care of Marie Feodorowna. It was she who arranged a marriage for Dorothea with Christopher, third son of Madame de Lieven, afterwards Prince of Lieven, and Russian Ambassador in London. The letters of the Princess of Lieven, many of them written to her brother Alexander, are well known.

They took their eldest daughter with them at this period. Poor Alexandra had never quite got over her bitter disappointment about the King of Sweden, nor the death of her grandmother, to whom she had been tenderly attached. Though considered marriageable, she was a mere child. When her governess was away on leave she occupied her mother's room, and shed childish tears when she had to return to her own apartment, and in the absence of her father she was ever her mother's constant companion. "Poor child," wrote the anxious mother, "she has early learnt to know what sorrow means!"

The question of her marriage was once more brought forward, and this time the suitor was one of the Archdukes of Austria. The Czarina tried hard to persuade herself that this union would be for her girl's happiness. The Archduke Charles having bad health, his younger brother Joseph was selected, but this union, in spite of the poor mother's hopes and prayers, did not prove a very happy one.

Whenever the Czar was absent from her, Marie Feodorowna was miserable, and used to pour out her soul almost daily to Mdlle. Nelidoff. Some of these letters have been preserved.

It is touching to see with what affection the Czarina writes of "her dear Emperor," who, in spite of many disagreeable qualities, was still to

her the lover of her youth, and with what gracious condescension she admits her faithful maid-of-honour into this home intimacy, always speaking of him as belonging in love and reverence to them both. Had there been a vestige of truth in the rumours current of the relations between Paul and Catherine Nelidoff, such a pure-minded woman as Marie Feodorowna would have been the last to countenance and overlook such a scandal. Since the stern rule of her mother-in-law had been removed, the Czarina must have enjoyed to the utmost the liberty of action that was at last hers, and above all the luxury of seeing her children when and as she pleased, and bringing them up after her own fashion. Her family was such a large one, and ranged from her two married sons and marriageable daughters, to the overflowing nursery of little ones who so fully occupied her time and thoughts. That summer of 1797 was spent at Pavlovsk, and it was a very wet and unpleasant one, and the Empress filled her letters with complaints of the bad weather as people do at the present time. One of the accounts she gives of her nursery party is quite charming, showing the happy life she spent among her little ones, at a time when the opinion of the world in general was, that she was leading a most dreadful existence with a brutal madman for a husband.

We arrived here safely yesterday. Monsieur Nicholas and Annette have rejoined me. The boy has grown enormously, but not Annette, she is, however, a sweet little creature. Nicholas cried a great deal on first seeing me, he did not remember me, but now we are quite friends. He is as beautiful as a cupid. I miss my dear Emperor greatly. Alexandrine is so much better and so happy at being with me, she is only dreading her governess's return, as then she will leave my room.

My pretty little girls are all well. To-day we read aloud by turns while the rest worked. My little circle is so happy and content. Nicholas gave me two big kisses for bonbons this evening. "Chiske" and "Chaske"[1] cried with joy at seeing me back.

The death of the Baronne de Beckendorf, which occurred about that time, and the distance that separated her from Lanele, threw the Czarina more than ever into the society of Catherine Nelidoff. Her constant letters show what a solace the knowledge that she had still one devoted friend was to her. Her own health that year was very bad, she grew so weak, much alarm was felt. The death of her father, the Prince of Montbéliard, was a great grief to Marie Feodorowna, and she must have earnestly longed to be able to comfort her mother in person. These sorrows, added to the state of her health, caused the Czar much anxiety on her behalf.

[1] Doubtless pet names of two of her children.

In January, 1799, her youngest and last child Michael was born, which completed a family of ten children. Paul was much pleased at the birth of a fourth son. He was filled with solicitude for his wife, and watched over her with anxious care. In March the Dowager-Princess of Montbéliard was expected, and a palace was being specially prepared for her, as it had been decided that she should end her days in Russia beside her best-loved daughter. But while the preparations for her arrival were progressing, the news came of her sudden death. She had pined and drooped after the loss of her husband, and did not long survive him. This was a crushing sorrow to Marie Feodorowna, who adored her mother; but Paul once more surrounded her with every loving care and sympathy, and sought in every way in his power to comfort her in her bereavement.

CHAPTER XIV

FOREIGN politics greatly occupied the Czar. He entered into the cause of the kings with ardour. Catherine had been opposed to the French Revolution, but though she had professed to wish to aid the efforts of the powers who combated the overthrow of the monarchy, she went no further than promises and demonstrations.

Not so her son. Paul's whole soul had been in revolt at the horrors of the reign of terror, and he was filled with desire that the Bourbons should once more be seated on the throne of France. He received Louis XVIII. when he came to Russia with great state, and desired that he should reside in the Palace of Mittau for as long as he chose to remain.

In 1799 Paul declared war against the French, and sent an army into Italy to oppose the Republican generals, but the campaign was unfavourable, and the Russians met with reverses. At that time he was allied with the English, but thinking they were throwing obstacles in his way about Malta, of which island he had become Grand

Master, he insisted on breaking off all relations with them, and dismissed their Ambassador.

War was declared in 1800, and the Czar, veering round in his policy, entered into an alliance with Bonaparte, then First Consul of the French Republic. An increasing passion for the great Consul now possessed Paul. He surrounded himself with portraits of him, and used to drink his health in public. These were the actions of a man whose mind had by this time lost its balance.

In his inmost heart Paul must have known that his policy was a bad one, for he now began to live under a perpetual fear of death from either poison or sword. He even went so far at last as to have his food cooked with the greatest secrecy in his own apartments under the charge of his faithful valet Koutaïscoff.

The Empress saw the state of dissatisfaction in the country with alarm. She never made any allusion to, or expressed her opinions upon, foreign policy, but never for a moment did it occur to her that her husband would not succeed in ruling over his empire, or that his very life was in danger. Surrounded by her children, Marie Feodorowna still led a happy and peaceful life. She still continued her daily correspondence with Mdlle. Nelidoff, they used to exchange presents and patterns for needlework, and the Empress would send orders for embroideries to

be executed by the pupils at the Convent of Smolna.

On these balmy summer mornings, the Czarina usually sat on a large balcony or terrace on which her rooms opened, and which was filled with all her choicest and most favourite flowers. Here her little boys romped with their toys, causing a disorder which she used to call "the most charming spectacle to my eyes."

Dark as was the horizon, the Czarina was still in blissful ignorance of the tragedy slowly drawing near her home. In reply to a letter from Mdlle. Nelidoff full of good wishes for the Emperor's birthday, Marie Feodorowna, with her usual affectionate condescension, replies, "How often have we *fêted* this day together, and joined our ardent wishes for our dear Emperor!"

It was the last time, however, for Paul did not live to see another birthday. On August 2nd their Imperial Majesties were at Pavlovsk, and spending the evening, as was their wont, in the garden, surrounded by their family and suite. This palace was originally presented by Catherine to her son. It was beyond Tsarskoë-Selo, and was a favourite suburb of St. Petersburg. The country around was picturesque, and the grounds were extensive and beautifully laid out. In front of the castle is a monument to Paul I. representing him leaning on a stick, and the

inscription on the pedestal is, "To the Emperor Paul I., founder of Pavlovsk." Here Marie Feodorowna kept many of her art treasures and some fine pictures. The Sèvres dinner-service, the gift of Louis XVI., was preserved at this palace. They often spent the hot months here, and on this particular occasion they were strolling on the terrace in the fresh evening air. Suddenly the rolling of drums was heard. The Emperor remarked with surprise that it was too early for the curfew.

As the noise continued, his face contracted with fear, and exclaiming, "They are sounding an alarm!" he hurried towards the palace, followed by most of the gentlemen of his suite.

Marie Feodorowna not noticing her husband's terror, and seeing no cause for fear in the beating of a drum, strolled leisurely behind with her ladies. As they neared the palace entrance, they saw that the roads leading to it were occupied by part of one of the regiments of the garrison, and troops began pouring in on all sides of the park as if by magic.

The narrow ways outside the grounds were blocked in a few moments by cavalry and infantry arriving from all directions, the men jostling each other, and all asking where they were to go. One of the officers of the household, thinking the Czar was about to faint, offered him his arm, while

his wife, now alive to the peril of the situation, flew to his side.

The populace now began streaming into the gardens and on to the terrace, and the crowd became so great that several ladies, among them the Grand-Duchesses, were obliged to jump over the hedges for fear of being crushed. This continued for some time, fresh troops arriving, and those already there became blocked in the narrow roads.

At last one of the staff arrived on horseback, and, riding up to the Czar, informed him that the whole incident had been caused by a foolish soldier who had been practising calls on his trumpet, and in the barracks they had taken this as a warning of danger.

Orders were shouted to the troops to disperse, and the soldiers were marched back to their quarters.

The Emperor accepted the explanation offered to him, indeed, there was nothing else to be done, and after apologising to the Czarina for the annoyance she had been subjected to, he escorted her back to her apartments.

In silence they returned together, not even daring to communicate their fears to each other; but to show that they entertained no suspicions of their subjects, they continued to repair to the gardens of an evening as usual.

A day or two after, the whole party were walking

in another part of the grounds near the main road, which in that place was only separated from it by a thick hedge. The call of a trumpet was heard, and at once horsemen began arriving from all sides. The Emperor was furious, and raised his stick to strike the first-comer, the Grand-Dukes following his example. All were stupefied at this renewal of the former scene. The Empress lost her head. "Save your Sovereign, gentlemen!" she cried to the Chamberlains, and at the same time seized Count Potocki by the arm, and thrust him in front of Paul. Potocki, who was a rather stout young man, and always in mortal terror of the Czar, presented a somewhat absurd appearance. He was much more afraid of Paul, than he was of the soldiers.

This time the troops were stopped from assembling, and they were speedily dispersed, but no explanation was ever given. The soldiers still insisted that the orders to turn out had come from the Czar himself. Others said it was a joke of some ill-disposed person wishing to repeat the confusion and disorder of the previous day. Anyway, this was the last occurrence of the kind. The Imperial family tried to make light of the affair, but the gravest fears filled their hearts. Marie Feodorowna's eyes were opened, and a sickening dread entered her soul which nothing could remove.

Who was their enemy? Which of their so-

called counsellors was plotting against them? In turns she suspected each of them, and trusted none. The Czar's Minister, Count Pahlen, was at this time the foremost man in the State, and the veritable master of the situation. Paul had loaded him with dignities and honours, and presented him with large estates. While apparently submitting to his master's rules and many whims, he was secretly working to undermine his authority. His friends and allies were Prince Platon and Count Zouboff, and General Bensingnen. The latter, of German origin, though a British subject, was Pahlen's right arm. In February, 1801, Rostopchine, the last faithful adherent of Paul, was dismissed from his service, and the unhappy man, without knowing it, was thus surrounded by enemies.

But among all the persons they suspected, both Paul and his wife were convinced that in Pahlen they had a trusted servant. In a letter to Mdlle. Nelidoff, the Empress, while deploring the state of things generally and the administration of the country, said that Pahlen was a most honourable man, and the one she respected the most among those in power. And she expressed herself again still more emphatically in another letter, in which she said, "God grant that he does not leave St. Petersburg." What, however, the Czar did not know was, that Pahlen was a careless

official. He was a pleasure-loving man, and indulged secretly in many excesses; therefore the weight of duties with which the Emperor charged him was singularly distasteful to him, and he often found it hard to dissemble when in the presence of his Imperial master, but so subtle and so secret were his movements, that the ill-fated Czar continued to give him his full confidence, and trusted implicitly in him, at least as much as it was his nature to trust in any one. At any rate he saw no reason to regard him in the light of a foe.

Meanwhile, Count Pahlen laid his plans, and thinking the time ripe, determined to prepare the way by telling Paul that a plot was being formed against him, thus securing his own safety by having no apparent complicity in the matter. The anger and fury of the Czar at this intelligence passed all bounds.

"Who are the culprits?" he demanded.

"Sire," replied the crafty Minister, "prudence forbids me to name them, but you may rely on me to guard you in safety."

Naturally Paul would not be satisfied with this ambiguous reply, and as if with deep reluctance Pahlen at length informed him, that the Empress and her children had determined to take away the Imperial crown from him.

Instead of indignantly repudiating such a charge against Marie Feodorowna, and sending Pahlen

away in the disgrace he merited, the Czar's suspicious nature caused him to lend an ear to his minister's evil words, and little by little the poison was instilled into his veins till he became mad with rage and irritation. In the end he ordered his false counsellor to arrest his wife and sons, and confine them in the fortress. But this was going a step further than the crafty Pahlen thought prudent. He declined with protestations of dismay to do this dreadful deed. At least, if his master required such work from him, he must give him a signed authority before such a step could be taken.

Paul, distraught by fear, and forgetting all he owed to his noble wife, dead to all honour and loyalty in the frenzied state of his mind, signed the paper required of him, exclaiming, "Good and faithful Pahlen, I leave everything to thee, continue to watch over thy master, I pray thee."

The traitor having got what he required, assured his Sovereign of his faithful affection, and, armed with this document, like a second Judas, he repaired to the apartments of the Grand-Duke Alexander, and, laying it before him, said, "Monseigneur, you see by this that your unfortunate father the Emperor is no longer of sound mind. Unless we can succeed in securing him, your liberty, even your lives, are in danger. He will make you all prisoners."

Hardly had Alexander glanced at the paper than he exclaimed, "What! my brother also?" and when he saw his beloved mother's name, "This is too much," he cried, and buried his face in his hands. He remained silent, however, pondering over the request, and hesitating as to giving his consent to the project, which was to put the madman in safety for a while by shutting him up.

Count Pahlen left the unhappy Prince brooding over this family tragedy, but this was only the first act, the conspirators were bound to proceed much further. Alexander had refused his consent with the words, "The will of my father alone can direct his destiny and mine," and Pahlen had made the dramatic rejoinder, "Monseigneur, three days will without doubt decide the fate of your Imperial Highness, and that of your august mother, and of all Russia." After this Pahlen felt there was no time to be lost.

Paul brooded over the catastrophe which he believed to be imminent, and every moment he grew more and more convinced that he was surrounded by treachery save in the one quarter which he should have dreaded the most. The very evening before that of his death, a few days after the conversations recorded, there was a ball at the Palace of St. Michael where the Court was in residence.

Count Strogonoff, who was among the guests, was talking with the Czar.

"You think me the happiest of men," said the latter, "in this beautiful palace which I have taken such pleasure in building. This is the first time we have all assembled here. My wife is beautiful, as you see, so is my son, my daughters are charming. There they are, all before you. Well, in all those smiling faces I see my murderers!"

Count Strogonoff started back with horror. "You are being deceived by some one, Sire! This is an atrocious calumny!"

Paul fixed his haggard eyes on the speaker, and, taking his hand in his, answered solemnly, "What I have told you is the truth."

CHAPTER XV

ON the night of March 24th, after spending the evening with his family, the Czar retired early to rest. A party composed of five conspirators made their way quietly into the Palace, and met with no opposition till they reached the royal chamber. The two guards stationed at the door defended the entrance bravely, so much so indeed, that one was killed in the *mêlée*, yet even the noise of the scuffle aroused no one. It seems pretty evident that the household and the servants must have been bought over, no one having come to the rescue.

At the sight of the assassins, who had thus forced their way into his presence, Paul sprang out of bed, and, though unarmed, being a very vigorous man, he fought bravely for his life. In his despair he called aloud on Pahlen, but the traitor had taken good care not to enter the room.

No doubt in the suddenness of the onset he failed to recognise any of his murderers, but as one of them forced him bleeding and exhausted into an

armchair, he exclaimed, "Is it you, Zouboff? I thought you were my friend."

The rest then closed in, and strangled him as he sat. The stifled cries and groans penetrated to the ears of the Empress in the adjoining chamber, and she at once rushed to his assistance. Alas! only to find the doors of communication locked. Inspired by a fear of his wife's designs upon him, the unhappy man had that night doubly locked the doors which divided their rooms. Thinking he was ill, the Empress ran round by the long gallery, meeting no one by the way, but when she reached this entrance to the Czar's apartment all was over. Count Bensingen, who was standing at the door, gently opposed her coming in, telling her that the Emperor was no more. Not understanding the full extent of the tragedy, only grasping the fact that her husband was dead, the wretched woman fell fainting on the floor.

It was a bitterly cold morning; a freezing wind made it almost impossible to venture abroad, yet when the news went round St. Petersburg that the Czar was dead, a wild delirium seized on the populace. In spite of the inclement weather, the streets were soon filled with an eager, excited crowd, dancing and shouting, "A deliverance! A deliverance!" That night some of the houses were even illuminated, so indecent was the pleasure exhibited. One man at least grieved bitterly for

his late master, and that was the valet, Koutaïscoff. A letter had been sent to this man warning him of the plot, some one in the enemy's camp having repented and divulged the secret. Unfortunately, Koutaïscoff had not taken the trouble of opening his own letters that day. When he eventually did so, after the first excitement and terror attendant on the Emperor's death was over, and he found that he could have saved his master, his despair was too great for words.

The Colonel of the household troops had also been misled. A message had been sent to him purporting to come from the Czar himself, commanding him to withdraw the guard stationed beneath his window, as the noise of the soldiers' feet as they paced up and down disturbed his slumbers. The Colonel was a brave soldier and a staunch, loyal subject. When the truth burst upon him that he had been tricked, his grief was such that he fell dangerously ill. No doubts were, however, cast on his innocence of all complicity in the plot, and the proof of this was, that the Grand-Duke, now Alexander I., visited him daily during his illness.

Alexander himself was overwhelmed with grief. He fainted when he heard of his father's death. Now he saw clearly what had been the real intention of those who had sought to make Paul abdicate.

"Monsters!" he exclaimed, "I will not accept a crown stained with the blood of my father!" and he fled to the most remote part of his own palace, where he shut himself up and gave way to the natural grief which consumed him.

But what was the sorrow of these men compared with that of Marie Feodorowna when the terrible truth was broken to her in the early dawn of that blood-stained day. Within a few yards of the room where she had been slumbering, when the faint cry for help had reached her ear, her husband had been cruelly murdered. Though he had been sadly estranged from her of late, and caused her grave anxiety, nothing had ever altered her feelings towards him. Her thoughts as she gazed on that terrible corpse with the features distorted by the agony of a violent death, were such as would have filled even his enemies with pity. Through those distorted features she saw again Paul, as he was at that proud moment when she became Grand-Duchess of Russia, or when later, as Comte and Comtesse du Nord, the young couple had basked in the sunshine of success and pleasure with their royal friends.

The once cherished wife, now a widow and still a most beautiful woman, stood by the murdered Czar's bedside, her soul wrung with anguish as her past life seemed to be unrolled before her. In sorrow too deep even for words, day after day

she returned to that chamber of death to pray there, sometimes alone, and sometimes with her tiny boys. Once little Nicholas, who was destined in his turn to become ruler of that ill-fated throne, slipped his little warm hand into his mother's cold fingers, and lisped, "Why does father sleep so long?" and then the floodgates of her tears were opened, and, clasping her child in her arms, she burst into sobs and tears, which brought relief to her tortured brain.

At first she utterly refused to see her eldest son; but Alexander insisted on coming into his mother's presence. When Marie Feodorowna saw him, her feelings overcame her, and she cried out excitedly, "Do not dare to come near me! I see you covered with your father's blood."

Alexander stood before her listening in silence, as was his wont, to the poor distraught woman's frantic words, then raising his eyes to Heaven he said solemnly, "I take God as my witness that I never was in any way a party to this abominable crime!"

There was no mistaking the truth and earnestness of his words. Little by little the Czarina began to perceive that she had done her son an injustice, and, falling at his feet, she exclaimed, "I salute my Emperor."

Alexander lifted her tenderly in his arms, and with loving words tried to soothe her grief,

while he loaded her with every possible token of affection. The tender bond between them, which had indeed existed since his childhood, was never broken again. As long as he lived Alexander never refused her the smallest request. He ever treated her with unfailing respect and honour, often causing her to take precedence of the Empress Elizabeth, his wife.

Of the meeting of Marie Feodorowna and the faithful Catherine Nelidoff no record has been kept. That she hastened to the side of her beloved mistress, to gaze with her once more on the features of the dead Czar whom she had loved so well, there can be little doubt. What Catherine suffered on that awful day is sufficiently proved by the fact, that her hair turned white in those hours of grief and horror.

While his family mourned his loss sincerely the world at large paid but little attention to Paul's tragic death. He was looked upon as a dangerous madman by the other Powers. The people of England were in the greatest spirits when the news reached them, and no sympathy was expressed by any of the foreign Courts, including our own. King George took but faint interest in his brother sovereigns. The *Times* newspaper, on receipt of this intelligence, remarked, "We do not think it easy to account for the sudden death of the Czar at such a critical moment. He

is said to have been found dead in his chair of apoplexy."

It suited the policy of the moment to believe that Paul had died a natural death, and few cared how it had come about. It had, however, been an open secret in St. Petersburg that the Czar's life was in danger, and that a plot was being hatched against him. Consequently little surprise was expressed, and few questions were asked. It was said that at some social gathering on that fateful night, a young nobleman pulled out his watch, and remarked to the numerous company with whom he was spending the evening, "All must be over by now!"

The body of Paul was embalmed, and lay in state for six weeks, with the face exposed and slightly rouged. All were invited to pass in solemn procession and see their late Sovereign.

Meanwhile consternation prevailed in the palace, Alexander having refused to mount the blood-stained throne. His wife Elizabeth threw herself on her knees before him, and implored him for the sake of his family and his people to take the reins of Government, and not leave his enemies in possession and his country in a state of anarchy. Had he not done so, he would indeed have played into the hands of Pahlen and his fellow-conspirators, who were waiting anxiously to see what turn events would take. Alexander at last yielded,

overcome by the united prayers of his mother, his wife, and his brother, and consented to show himself to the multitude from the balcony of the palace. He was received with shouts and acclamations.

Could the new Czar have brought home the charge of murder against the assassins of his father he would willingly have done so; but Pahlen had taken care that everything should be so arranged that absolute proof was wanting, whatever might have been the opinions in certain circles. Alexander therefore concluded that a merciful policy was the wisest plan at this crisis, and he was most anxious to remove a slur from his parent's memory, and conceal from the world as much as he was able, the late Emperor's faults and follies. With the quiet caution which characterised him, he made no immediate changes in the Government. The faithful servants of the late Czar were liberally pensioned, and friends to whom Paul had granted official posts were allowed to retain them, while to the victims of his whims as much justice was extended as was possible, and many of them were rehabilitated. Many nobles were released from exile in Siberia, and it was felt on all sides that a golden reign had begun for Russia. With gentleness, perseverance, and conciliation, Alexander endeavoured to subdue the dangerous fermentation with which Paul's death had filled the

nation. He wished to bring the public mind back into the paths of duty, and this alone restrained his just desire for vengeance.

His coronation took place at Moscow in September with great pomp, and the transports of the populace when the diamond crown was placed by the Emperor on the head of the fair Empress Elizabeth, almost reached a frenzy.

Foremost among those gathered to do the Czar homage was his yet beautiful mother, now known by the title of the Empress-Mother. Putting aside her own grief, she came forward to see her son's triumph. But what the effort cost her, we learn from her correspondence, which, like a diary, seems to have been the medium through which she gave vent to her real inner thoughts.

"Why can I never," she writes, "think of my dear Emperor without tears? I see him ever before my eyes, though six months of my sorrow has now gone by. Time does not diminish a grief so profound as mine."

Alexander's accession was marked, as his father's had been, by many deeds of tardy justice, and all the irksome customs that the late Czar had introduced, were done away with. Restrictions on dress and amusements were removed, and people were once more able to indulge in whatever headgear pleased them best. Ladies must have rejoiced in being able to remain snugly ensconced in their

warm carriages, even if the Emperor was driving by, instead of having, as formerly, to turn out and stand curtseying in the mire or snow.

In Russia the serfs, who were practically slaves, used to be sold as if they were beasts of burden. This practice Alexander was anxious to put a stop to, and he published a ukase forbidding the sale of serfs, except with a portion of the land they lived on.

This humane Emperor was, however, before his time, and this charitable ordinance was never more than a dead letter. The instincts of the day all tended to cruelty. Life, especially the life of the lower orders, was not held sacred.

In spite of Alexander being full of good intentions, his reign was in reality little better than Paul's, though his own immediate acts were not tinged with so much barbarity. Like his father, he was a great patron of Art. The Winter Palace was his favourite residence when the Court was at St. Petersburg. It was an enormous building, and said to accommodate three thousand persons. Adjoining it was the Hermitage, the famous retreat of the great Catherine. Here she had been wont to retire for privacy and relaxation and unrestrained amusement, but her successors turned it more or less into an art gallery.

The situation of the Winter Palace was most beautiful. The windows overlooked the Neva,

which here is as wide as the Thames at Gravesend. The quays of pink granite reflected in the pellucid stream, and mingling with the dark blue waters, tinges the river with lovely colours. The Imperial barges often made the journey from Cronstadt, arriving at the great water gate of the palace, and on a summer evening, when the sun was striking on the gilded steeples, and the long sweeping shadows brought out into strong relief the grand proportions of the colossal entrance columns, the scene was as striking as can well be imagined.

Catherine used to issue invitations for vast assemblies in the Hermitage, when all the fine rooms in both palaces would be thrown open, brilliantly lighted with innumerable wax tapers. Alexander and his Empress did the same, and the guests could walk through these long galleries of art treasures into the Winter Palace, and on to the theatre beyond. No Court in Europe presents such a magnificent appearance as that of Russia, when seen in a State reception in the Winter Palace. The collection of pictures and other valuables was immense. Paul added greatly to it, and Alexander continued his father's work. The Raphael Gallery contained the copies from the Vatican already alluded to, and many pictures from that master's hand, besides paintings by Correggio, Guido, and Canaletto in the grand saloon. Sir Joshua Reynolds' famous picture of

the "Infant Hercules Strangling a Serpent" was in this collection, and in the dining-hall were some of the best works of the Dutch School, including pictures by Cuyp, Paul Potter, and still-life subjects by Van Huysum.

The billiard-room, which had been specially constructed by Catherine, who excelled at that game, was also hung with choice paintings by the old masters. An immense art collection is now to be seen at the Hermitage, but it was not so extensive in Paul's lifetime. Private collections gradually found their way into these galleries, but at a much later date. The Winter Palace, too, as it is now, is not the same as when Alexander and Elizabeth, like two happy children, roamed about their huge palace among the wonderful possessions that were now theirs. In 1837 the great palace was almost entirely consumed by fire, and therefore the accounts of its magnificence found in the old records are the only ones that give us the real idea of the place where Marie Feodorowna had reigned supreme.

There was one drawback to the felicity of the people of Russia, and that was, that there was no direct heir. But hopes were raised by the condition of the Czarina, and all waited impatiently for the birth of her child. But the nation and the parents were alike doomed to disappointment. The expected infant was a girl, and she only

survived her birth a few hours. No mention of this child is to be found in the history of the day; the sorrow of the young parents for an infant daughter was of no moment in the eyes of the world. Indeed, some writers maintain that Alexander never had any children. But the fact is recorded in those intimate letters of the Empress-Mother that reveal so much of the real inner life of that Russian Court.

She writes in July, 1802:

The poor little darling sank this morning. She was like a light that flickers and dies. The state of the poor mother was heart-breaking. My poor son was also deeply distressed.

CHAPTER XVI

THE Empress-Mother lived principally at Pavlovsk, where she cultivated roses in her beautiful gardens, and was able to enjoy the peace and rest, which her age and position demanded. In 1803, Catherine, her third daughter, married George, Duke of Oldenburg.[1]

The Grand-Duchess Anna seems to have been a very special favourite with her mother, perhaps because, on account of her delicacy, she needed more care.

In the summer of that year Marie Feodorowna experienced a great sorrow, for she received the unexpected tidings of the death of her dear Lanele. Though their paths in life had widely diverged, the same tender love existed between them that had never altered since their childhood. "Tilline" had been dead many years, and now "Lanele" was taken from her.

It was the "little Marie," the Baronne d'Oberkirch's daughter, now the wife of the Comte de

[1] He died in 1812, and four years after she married the Prince of Wurtemberg, who was made King Wilhelm I. She was the favourite sister of Alexander.

Montbrisson, who announced the sad intelligence to the Empress-Mother. Marie Feodorowna wrote her in reply the following touching letter:

Madame de Montbrisson,

It is with the most sincere regret that I learn the sorrowful news of the death of your lamented mother, who was my dearest friend, and whose tender love and constant affection, will remain for ever graven on my memory. I am fulfilling a duty near to my heart, in giving you this testimony of my esteem for the dear departed. Send me, I beg of you, all the details of her last illness. I was ignorant even of the fact that her health was failing, otherwise I might have been able to send her some last words of love and consolation. Be assured that I will always manifest the greatest interest in the daughter of such an estimable mother, and that I remain most sincerely and affectionately yours,

Marie.

Yet another sorrow came before the year was closed. This time it plunged the whole Court, as well as the Imperial family into mourning. This was the death of the Grand-Duchess Hélène, Princess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, the second daughter of Marie Feodorowna, a most lovely creature, only lately married. The little baby Olga had been the first to go in that large family, but that had been a loss that touched few save the mother. This was a very different affliction. To Marie Feodorowna it was another light gone out, another empty place that nothing could refill;

but the brave woman struggled on, ever putting her own private feelings aside for the sake of all those who depended on her.

During these years she watched carefully over the education of her two young sons, a privilege that had been denied her with her elder ones. Hers was not, however, a spoiling affection, her ideas of duty and order were somewhat rigid, and even her tenderness had a tinge of severity in it.

Alexander took but little notice of these younger brothers, and they were rarely admitted into the Court circle. They knew nothing of politics or State intrigues, but were brought up very strictly, as any other young officers might have been, and were accustomed by their mother to habits of industry and good conduct.

In 1807 the Czar had renewed his treaty with Napoleon Bonaparte, which was signed on a raft moored in the middle of the Niemen, where the two Emperors met, they having broken their agreement at the time of the Austrian campaign, and Alexander was anxious to cement their friendship further by a closer relationship.

Napoleon having dissolved his union with Josephine, Alexander sought to strengthen the alliance by a marriage between the French Emperor and his sister, Anna Paulovna,[1] but the

[1] Some authorities say it was the Grand-Duchess Catherine before her second marriage.

match did not meet with the approval of the Empress-Mother. She declared that the laws of the Orthodox Church did not allow marriage with a divorced man, and the young Princess herself was strongly opposed to the plan. Indeed, from a personal point of view, it was not one to commend itself to them.

Napoleon, who never brooked any rebuff or delay, soon lost patience, and repaired to Austria to ask for the hand of Marie-Louise.

There was no real cordiality between these two monarchs, during the short time peace lasted between them. It was Napoleon who said with infinite contempt, "Scratch a Russian, and you will find a Tartar!" and he called Alexander "A Greek of the lower Empire."[1]

In 1809 Alexander broke once more with the French, and on June 23rd, 1812, the army of Napoleon entered Russia, and marched on to Vilna. For a time, indeed, Russian affairs were at their lowest ebb, and, leaving the victorious army in possession, the Czar's troops retreated to Moscow.

The history of this campaign is too well known to need description. Napoleon, with troops by this time heartily tired of war, and more than half famished, marched across the vast plains to the

[1] Another of Napoleon's sayings was, "Malheur à l'Empire de Russie si jamais il s'élève un Czar qui porte une barbe!"

ancient capital, and when the golden minarets and spires came into view, he deluded them by promises that all should be theirs. But when he entered the city, which was the goal of his ambition, it was only to find it deserted by the inhabitants, and the Kremlin on fire. They had made this supreme sacrifice, rather than see their city fall into the hands of the conqueror.

This is a page of history that sent a thrill through the civilised world.

Then came the retreat with all its attendant horrors, of which historians and novelists alike have given ample details, but even disasters failed to intimidate this wonderful man, who was born to conquer, and who had begun to believe he was invincible even under defeat. Though three-quarters of his great army had been left dead on the plains of Russia, he continued his march as if it had been the road to glory. Marie Feodorowna, waiting in breathless expectancy at St. Petersburg, was able in January, 1813, to write triumphantly, "Napoleon was beaten at Wittgenstein under the Emperor's eyes. God be praised!"

Bonaparte was no longer invulnerable, the charm was broken, and the popular idol had descended into the class of ordinary men.

It was Alexander who insisted on the Allies adopting the plan of marching on Paris in March, 1814. Louis XVIII. made his entry into the

Louvre on May 3rd of that year, and there received the Czar with all the ceremonial of the ancient Court. He gave him a chair of State, while he mounted the throne himself. Alexander's mind, like that of Peter the Great, was ever turned with interest towards the institutions and monuments of a country, and he cared but little for Court ceremonial and etiquette. He was hailed as the deliverer of Paris by the French people, who looked to him for protection as well. The Russians were less grasping than most of the Allies, for all they asked was temporary occupation and a war indemnity, while the Prussian troops terrified the citizens by their violence.

Alexander entered Paris, therefore, in the guise of a conqueror at the head of a triumphant army. He would have been less than mortal if he had not felt some of the intoxication of success, hailed on all sides as the saviour of the nation. No wonder his mother was so proud of him. She sent her two young boys in his train. Handsome Nicholas was very much admired, and both boys naturally enjoyed themselves greatly, and were immensely *fêted*.

After a visit to London, where he was received with demonstrations of joy, the Czar returned to St. Petersburg, there to be clasped in the arms of his mother, exulting at her son's well-earned triumph.

Some years of peace and contentment now prevailed in Russia, and the Czar occupied himself with the wise government of his country. The people, or at any rate the upper classes, were once more in a state of prosperity. The serfs still lived on their black bread and garlic, and for sole comfort drank their kwas, made of fermented barley. Hardship was their appointed lot, and they accepted it with hardly a murmur. Warmth was all they asked for, to enable them to brave the rigours of their severe climate. Those who were fortunate enough to own a hovel, however poor, with a stove in it, really suffered far less from the cold than the inhabitants of more temperate countries might imagine. The national stove with its slow combustion of fuel, renders even the poorest huts habitable. In England we may say without exaggeration that nine-tenths of the heat is lost. Out of every ten tons of coal consumed, the heat of nine warms only the bricks of the chimneys! In France and Germany the stoves, though giving out an equal temperature, engender gas, and make the atmosphere most unpleasant to those unaccustomed to that mode of heating. The Russian stove, on the other hand, is a vast construction, built of brick divided into many parts, the oven itself being extremely small. When this is heated with wood it warms very slowly, but once it has become

thoroughly hot, it emits the caloric which the bricks, being non-conductors, have absorbed.

The boiling bath is another of the luxuries which Russians of all classes indulge in. It is worked on the same principle as the Turkish bath, but instead of massage the bather often underwent flagellation with twigs, probably to increase the circulation.

In spite of the many improvements in the government and the policy of the day, a dread of exile still hung like a black cloud over the entire people. No one could be persuaded to buy or to live in the houses of those who had been sent to Siberia, as they imagined the successor would share the same fate. This superstitious prejudice was the cause of many magnificent houses having been allowed to fall into ruins. When a great man was exiled, all his servants and secretaries were sent there with him, consequently, when his disgrace was imminent, they used to abandon him, and he would be found left alone.

While the poorer classes spent their lives in a state of existence little better than beasts of burden, the upper and middle classes indulged in the greatest extravagance. A wealthy Russian would give any price for a beautiful or rare article, such as pictures, jewels, or fine furs. The wives of rich merchants used to load themselves with finery,

utterly regardless of taste. Glaring colours and incongruous ornaments were their delight, as long as they were expensive. This spirit of display hid an absolute want of refinement, and elegance. They lacked the good manners and urbanity, and all those sentiments which tend to the honour and humanity of Western nations. In fact, this class acted like parvenus, and they had none of the genial disposition of similar people in Paris.

As the years went by and the restoration of peace left the Czar no difficult policy to occupy his mind, a change began to come over him. That fatal cloud that ever seemed to hang above the throne of Russia, now began to envelop Alexander. He also grew gloomy and suspicious. A nameless dread encompassed him, till he began to fear to be alone. He used to insist on his rooms being filled with lighted tapers even in the day-time, as if he felt that nothing but a brilliant light could drive away the gloom within.

The disappointment of having no heir may have had something to do with the estrangement which was now apparent between himself and his wife, anyway, he sought consolation elsewhere. The beautiful Madame Narishkin, the *prima donna* of the Opera, for some time held his heart, and Madame de Krudener had an immense influence over him. She was the wife of a diplomatist, and was a woman with high ideals, and was filled with

spiritual exaltation, which she communicated to the Emperor, and he gradually became a dreamy mystic. Her *salon* had been one of the most popular in Paris when her husband was serving there. She advocated universal brotherhood and greatness of soul, and filled the Czar's mind with wild and impracticable ideas, while she failed altogether to raise his spirits, or clear his mind from imaginary troubles. Those around him now began to see clearly that he had lost the frank, engaging gaiety which had distinguished him formerly. He seemed discontented and depressed, and courted solitude.

All this time his fair young wife suffered in silence. Dearly as she loved him, she had not the power to hold his affections nor to influence him. Unlike her mother-in-law, though endowed with many similar noble qualities, she lacked the talent and wisdom which had enabled Marie Feodorowna never to loosen her hold over Paul till the end.

Elizabeth was beloved by all who knew her, but the part she played in the world was a very small one. Whatever may have been his shortcomings as a husband, Alexander's behaviour as a son from first to last was beyond reproach. To the end of his life he treated his mother not only with love and devotion, but with the utmost reverence. She must indeed have been a woman of no ordinary intelligence, for the Czar thought

fit to consult her in all the most trying moments of his life.

There is no doubt that the arrangement which ensued for the accession of Alexander's younger brother, Nicholas, in preference to Constantine, was the work of this intrepid Princess.

Constantine, having married as his second wife a Polish lady of noble but not of Royal birth, his mother was opposed to the idea of his succeeding his brother, and as he was an unambitious man who preferred his home life to a public one, he was quite ready to fall in with her views, and retire in favour of Nicholas, who had married a Prussian Princess, and was already the father of an heir.

In 1825 the Empress Elizabeth had fallen into a very bad state of health, which seems to have puzzled her physicians, and in the summer they thought it might be beneficial for her to try the effect of sea air, so it was proposed that the Court should move to Taganrog, in the hopes of restoring her failing health.

Taganrog was situated on a cliff at the mouth of the river Don, commanding a view of the Sea of Azof. It was five hundred leagues from St. Petersburg, a most dreary spot on a very exposed coast. The melancholy aspect of the place seemed to have had special attractions for the Czar, for he decided to buy a large estate, and build a new

palace there. It had been founded by Peter the Great, and the large and well-fortified harbour was his work, but the water supply was bad, and there was nothing much to recommend the place as a residence except the fine air.

Now that the life of Elizabeth was menaced, the old affection of the Emperor returned, and he was most solicitous for her well-being, and willingly exiled himself from his family, at this immense distance from the capital. Here, in December, the Emperor was suddenly taken ill, but he declared to his doctors that he was suffering only from intense nervousness. It was now Elizabeth's turn to nurse her husband. During his short illness the devoted wife never left the bedside. The symptoms puzzled the physicians, and the patient's apathy did not tend to bring back his failing powers.

It seemed as if the weight of his sovereignty had crushed him, and the knowledge that perfidy and ingratitude surrounded him, had long broken his spirit. The Czar had lost all heart, and made no struggle for life.

Knowing the anxiety which the Empress-Mother would feel, Elizabeth wrote her letters nearly every day, but she herself had little hope of his recovery from the beginning. The first account had filled the nation with alarm and consternation, and prayers were offered up by millions of people for

the safety of the beloved Czar. Dark rumours were not wanting that the illness was not entirely due to natural causes. This was not surprising, for the Czar's fears were well known, and it is more than probable that these rumours were not unfounded. The advice to remove the Court to that desolate far-away region, may in itself have been the outcome of some plot against the Crown.

CHAPTER XVII

THE state of the Czar fluctuated, as most illnesses do, and news was sometimes bad and sometimes more assuring. At last the Czarina was able to write almost hopefully, and to say that there was a decided turn for the better.

On receipt of this intelligence all St. Petersburg was wild with joy. Thousands repaired to the churches to offer up their thanks for this Divine mercy, and Marie Feodorowna went on foot to the Cathedral, there to implore the Almighty to spare her beloved son to her and to the nation. While they were chanting the Te Deum, a messenger arrived with the fatal news that the Emperor was no more. The letter was placed in the hands of the Grand-Duke Nicholas. Filled with grief and consternation, and unable himself to break the news to his mother, he bethought him of making use of the officiating priest, hoping that by the aid of religion the blow might be softened to her. He sent therefore the sad missive to the Prelate, who was before the altar. The good man was greatly distressed at the terrible

task imposed upon him, but he had never shirked a duty, however painful, and this brooked of no delay. Taking the crucifix from off the altar, and hastily veiling it with crape, he slowly descended the steps, and, bearing it aloft, advanced towards the Empress-Mother. At this slow and solemn approach, with this emblem of their faith swathed in a veil of black, the unhappy mother guessed the truth, and, unable to bear the strain any longer, she sank fainting at his feet.

Thus it was that the news went forth throughout that vast assemblage, and through all St. Petersburg, and the sorrowing people learned that the beloved Czar was dead.

The end came suddenly. Elizabeth was sitting in the darkened chamber thinking that he slept. Suddenly the Emperor asked for more light. She drew back the curtains of the window, and let a flood of sunshine into the room. "How beautiful!" he exclaimed faintly, and they were the last words that he uttered. A few moments afterwards they perceived that he was gone.

Our Angel has rendered to-day his Divine soul to his Creator (wrote Elizabeth to Marie Feodorowna). To me there remains nothing in the world. Before I am called to rejoin him I have but one duty to fulfil, and that is to conduct his beloved remains to the tomb of his ancestors. My only hope is to be reunited to him.

Alas! poor woman, she had little else to hope for. The grief of this unexpected loss was more than her frail body could bear. She little thought when she was taken to Taganrog as a last chance for herself, that her return journey would be made alone, following the bier of her husband. By slow stages the body of the Czar was borne to its last resting-place in the Imperial vault at St. Petersburg, and those stages were made even slower and shorter as the poor Czarina's health visibly failed. Nothing would induce her to give up the task or intrust it to others, and ere she reached the capital, at some wayside place, the name of which has not been recorded, she breathed her last, and her gentle spirit fled from a world which had been too much for her.

Her life was short, but it had been the life of a saint, enriched with all the virtues that can adorn her sex. All hearts in the land of her adoption had felt for her in her sad bereavement, for the gentle Empress had been loved from the time she had first come to Russia, and all mourned her premature death. Two biers were carried in the great funeral procession that entered St. Petersburg, and were borne in state through crowds of sorrowing people. Foremost were all the members of the Imperial Family, who had loved both Alexander and his wife so dearly. With many

tears and heartfelt grief, the Czar and Czarina were laid to their rest together.

Great excitement prevailed throughout Europe when the news became known. Alexander was regretted in all the Courts, for he had been personally known and liked by many of the reigning sovereigns, but the momentous question on which many interests depended was who was to be his successor.

Notwithstanding that the renunciation of Constantine to the throne had been established some time before, Nicholas had the delicacy to cause his elder brother to be proclaimed Czar. The brothers vied with each other in generously giving up their respective claims, a unique example, as heirs to a throne have more often fought sword in hand for their heritage. Even Constantine's wife, the Princess Iowitch, knelt at his feet, and, imploring him to forget that she had ever existed, begged him to renounce his love for her, and accept the crown that was his by right of birth. But the Empress-Mother intervened. She reminded her sons that they had given their word to that dearly beloved brother, who was no longer among them, and as the interests of Russia would be best served by the accession of Nicholas, she begged them not to let sentiment interfere.

It may perhaps be said that Marie Feodorowna, in acting thus, was merely forwarding the interest

of her youngest and favourite son. The *Times* newspaper, in a leading article in December, 1825, calls her "that able, artful, and ambitious female."

Able and ambitious she doubtless was, but the opprobrious epithet of "artful" might well have been spared her. Her wise counsels had for so many years been followed by both her husband and eldest son, that we may well believe that in these last years of her life, she desired above all things the welfare of their country.

Constantine had never been a favourite from his youth up, indeed, he was detested by the Russian nobles. He was a taciturn, morose-tempered man, though his rugged nature hid some fine qualities, and he had a generosity of mind which his younger brother never attained to. He committed deeds of cruelty such as Nicholas would never have perpetrated. He had been known to fire from the palace windows at the serfs at work in the park simply for amusement, and in moments of monstrous and irrational anger would practise deeds of bloodshed. Yet he had been capable, as we have seen, of giving up a crown rather than desert the woman he loved. Like the rest of the family, he also adored his mother, and his relations with Alexander had always been perfect, a real affection having existed between the brothers.

England was specially rejoiced at the final

decision, and the Duke of Wellington was sent, nominally, as a representative at Alexander's funeral, really on a diplomatic visit to the new Czar.

On December 26th Nicholas was proclaimed Emperor of All the Russias, to the entire satisfaction of the nation, and once more the people hailed with delight a new sovereign who was to be the means of endowing them with every blessing.

Nicholas was at that time thirty years of age, he had married in 1817 Princess Charlotte Wilhelmina of Prussia, and was already the father of one son and two daughters. He was of colossal stature, and had long been considered the handsomest man in Russia. He towered above the crowd wherever he appeared, and always preferred being seen on foot or in a carriage, for his seat on horseback was stiff, and he was a timid rider. For his beauty alone he was a popular favourite. The army adored him, and from first to last were ever ready to follow at his call. He had a passion for military details, and exercised an unlimited authority. His popularity lay in the fact that he could not bear to see one of his soldiers in any danger, and cared for each one of the rank and file as though they were indeed his children. The "Little Father" became an object of adoration to them. His voice was sonorous, and when giving the word of command the deep tones were like the notes of an organ.

His coronation was fixed for September, 1826, but just before the ceremony he was seized with some unaccountable malady. The alarm in the palace must have been pretty general; however, it was attributed to malaria—perhaps at that season the proximity to the river was deemed unhealthy, for he was removed to the house of Count Orloff at the other extremity of St. Petersburg. Why he was removed to the house of a subject is not explained, possibly the palaces were all undergoing repairs and decorations for the new reign.

The Empress-Mother was also in very delicate health, and required the greatest care and attention. As a rule she now resided at the Archiepiscopal Palace in St. Petersburg.

As soon as Nicholas had recovered, the Imperial family left for Moscow for the coronation, and his mother insisted on accompanying him.

What must have been the feelings of Marie Feodorowna at this, the third coronation ceremony in which she had taken part. In imagination she must have seen the pageant, when the diamond crown was placed by her husband on her own fair head, amidst the acclamations of the people. Then again in the mourning robes of her widowhood, she had been a spectator of, if not a participator in, the same ceremony which placed her dearly beloved firstborn on the throne, the steps to which, alas! had been steeped in blood—that

son, only nineteen years younger than herself, to whom she had been a playmate as well as a guide through his early years, and his constant companion and friend during his reign. And now that noble life, had also come to a premature close, and the mother who had hoped that it would be his hand that would be there to close her eyes in death, had been called upon to follow his funeral bier, and see his successor crowned. Elizabeth, too, was gone, the gentle girl who had so early joined her own fair bevy of daughters, and had been to her like one of them. She had been early laid to rest, and left them doubly desolate. And now standing before her in his regal robes was her beautiful boy, her handsome Nicholas, between whom and herself no alien influence had ever been allowed to come. He had been hers from babyhood, and could not even remember his father. He now was her Emperor! His Consort stood beside him, with the crown of diamonds on her head, the observed of all observers.

Suddenly the Czar left his throne, and, descending the steps in the sight of all the people, advanced to where the Empress-Mother was seated. She rose, and would have thrown herself at his feet in token that he was now her ruler, but he caught her in his arms ere she could kneel to do him obeisance. Embracing her with the

tenderest affection, he led her gently to the place beside him on the daïs, and the air was rent with shouts of joy. Then, taking the piece of the true cross, a relic kept in a convent at Moscow, Nicholas reverently bowed the knee in the sight of all the people, before this symbol of their common faith. He was desirous to show every possible respect for the religion in which he had been reared, and to impress upon his subjects by this display of feeling, that he venerated and held sacred what was to them also most dear.

They augured many good things from this outward observance, and it gave the new Czar at once a prestige in the eyes of the multitude. And thus began the new reign.

Nicholas I., like all the Czars, was an absolute autocrat. When the Winter Palace was burnt down, and the art galleries were saved with difficulty from the terrible conflagration, he took the catastrophe very calmly, and ordered it to be rebuilt at once and finished within the year. The unhappy architect remonstrated with the Czar as much as he dared. To accomplish such a work in so short a time seemed to him an impossibility. "God Himself," he exclaimed, "required a week in which to create the world." But no heed was paid to his expostulations. It was the Emperor's orders, and that was enough, and as often happens, the seeming impossibility

was accomplished, and at the given time, the Czar sat in triumph on the throne in his new palace. The Nicholas Hall was specially built and decorated under his orders.

Peterhoff, which was two leagues beyond Tzarskoë-Selo, was one of his favourite summer palaces, and "Mon Plaisir," on the sea coast, was much frequented by him. It had been built and laid out by Peter the Great, which was perhaps the reason his descendants thought so much of it, for it was in execrable taste. The gardens were filled with arbours, ill-designed and ill-planned, concealing all sorts of absurd mechanical toys, clocks and organs, ducks and water-fowl, deer and hounds, set in motion by water power. The old Czar's amusements had been rather childish.

Nicholas caused many more canals to be made for the great water traffic, and cut the sod for the first railway laid in Russia, and he did not neglect the learning of the country, for he created professorial institutes, with a view of removing Russian youths from the influence of foreign masters, which had been the method of education hitherto. Nicholas lived till 1855, and died, as is well known, in the middle of the Crimean War.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT is not, however, the history of the reign of Nicholas I. on which we desire to dwell. The details of it are all recorded in history, and the subject of this Memoir lived only two years after her son's accession.

It is rather as the son of Marie Feodorowna that his character is touched upon here. It is doubtful whether the Empress-Mother took such an active part in the management of affairs during his reign as she had done before, for her span of life was drawing to a close. After so many repeated shocks she had no longer the same vigour of mind and body. Possibly she was less alive to any defects in the character of Nicholas, than she had been to those of her dearly loved Alexander, for fondly as she had loved that first pledge of affection, the dear tie between Paul and herself, the knowledge of Catherine's rule and Catherine's influence over the young Prince, must have given her cause for anxiety. She must often have fancied that he was being led away from what she considered the paths

of rectitude, and that he needed his mother at hand to guide him rightly.

But with Nicholas it was different, he was all her own, and her mother's love may have blinded her to his faults.

Nicholas determined to rule in person, and leave power over life and death in no man's hand. He personally supervised and inspected every department, and it might have been supposed in consequence that tyranny and injustice would have been suppressed. On the contrary, his cruelties were without end. He never ameliorated the condition of men in his empire, as they soon found to their cost, indeed, one may say he rendered it worse.

And so, though Nicholas began his reign in the more enlightened nineteenth century, and with every intention of being a great ruler, he was, we repeat, no better nor worse than his predecessors. Other tyrants have been more sanguinary in intention, he perhaps succeeded in doing more harm. Also, as time went on, it became apparent that though Nicholas was not an obstacle to progress, he was somewhat of a drag upon it. He possessed neither the talents nor the learning of Peter the Great, nor the brilliant qualities of his grandmother. He was far from the barbarities practised in Paul's lifetime, yet he had not the chivalrous generosity of his father. His was a stronger character than that of Alexander, and he

had none of his irresoluteness, but neither had he the same benevolent disposition. His passions were well under control, and his life was orderly and his Court free from scandal. It was not the temple of impurity it had been in Catherine's time, indeed, he was incapable of her vices. As rulers went, he was not considered a bad man.

During his nineteen years' reign only seven men were actually condemned to death, capital punishment having been practically abolished, though many died through the cruelties inflicted upon them. Impaling, beheading, hanging up on hooks, were now forbidden by law, yet whole troops of Polish prisoners were knouted to death.

The life of Nicholas brings us down to our own times, and yet deeds of atrocity which make the blood run cold, were perpetrated in his day and by his orders.

Through the long years that Marie Feodorowna lived in Russia at the Imperial Court, it is hard to believe that these terrible tales of sufferings and injustice never reached her ears. It is dreadful to reflect that much less than a hundred years ago (she has only been dead seventy-six years), deeds were done by the orders of her husband and sons the recital of which fills us with horror. I would not sully these pages with the description of them.

The books of the period, memoirs, and secret histories of the Court of Russia, are filled with

disgusting and degrading stories, not only tales of torture, but of immorality and vice. We look in vain in such books for the witty, if somewhat improper stories, with which the French memoirs of the time abound. These dark tales are only brutalities and indecencies. The Russian literature points too clearly to the fact, that this nation, though rich and all-powerful, was plunged in barbarism, and crimes were daily being committed worthy of the Middle Ages and the Inquisition. The knout, which almost flayed its victims alive without putting an end to their sufferings, was used at the pleasure of those in authority, without regard for age or sex or rank. Skilful executioners could give the death-blow with this instrument of torture, but the order to do so was rarely given, for after torture came exile, and the maimed and bleeding bodies of the victims, were conveyed to the living tombs of Siberia.

Aged and honourable men, mothers of unborn infants, ladies of high degree, suffered, in this awful manner, and the punishment was utterly incommensurate with their crimes, which were mostly political ones. If the order of the Czar went forth, no man could gainsay it. Is it possible that in that less refined age their feelings were blunted, or was it, that in a land where slavery was allowed human beings became of less account?

Could Marie Feodorowna have known of these

tragedies and remained silent? Surely the Imperial throne would have been watered by her tears, and her supplications would not have been all in vain. We hear of no instance of the royal ladies praying for a reprieve. We can hope for their sakes that the stories of these dark deeds never penetrated into their palaces. But it is impossible for the Western mind to comprehend the inner working of the Slav mind.

The Russians of yesterday, as of to-day, are a complex people—a mixture of romance and mysticism, and brutal animal passions. Full of humaneness and cruelty, of refinement and coarseness, they are a perpetual paradox. No more charming persons exist in the world than well-bred Russians. Their manners, their intellect, their intelligence, all charm by turns. Then remembrance of the nation's brutality comes to check this personal admiration. The Slav appears on the surface, and usurps the place of the polished European.

Marie Feodorowna's life was drawing to a close. On September 28th, 1828, she wrote the last letter that is recorded as coming from her hand, which is a touching proof of the unalterable love, and faithful devotion to the memory of her husband.

Dearest friend (she writes to the faithful Nelidoff), I received your letter of yesterday with much

pleasure and gratitude, seeing that you were thinking of me, when you approached the tomb which covers the ashes of him my soul will cherish till the moment that reunites us.

We cannot believe that this was the last communication between these friends, the maid-of-honour and her Imperial mistress. Most likely the failing health of the Empress-Mother necessitated the close attendance of Mdlle. Nelidoff, and we prefer to think that she left her institution to the charge of others, and hastened to the palace, there to remain and watch over and solace the last moments of Marie Feodorowna.

The long and honourable life was fast coming to a close. She had lived through much sorrow, but much joy also, and her brave, steadfast nature had supported her through it all. Her life's work was finished. She did not quite reach to the threescore years and ten, the allotted span of man's time on earth, but she had fully lived every hour of those years, since the early marriage which had led her eventually to the greatest throne of Europe. A wife and mother of Czars, she had shown herself worthy of her task, and had virtually reigned three times over that vast empire.

Nowhere is her death recorded in the Russian memoirs of the day. Whether her illness was long or short—whether her seven surviving children were able to surround her bed or not, we do not

know. At least we may presume that it was the Emperor Nicholas who closed her eyes in death.

One record only of her decease has been left, but that is not from a Russian source. Once more we must turn for information to the English papers.

On November 21st, 1828, the following notice appeared in London :

By St. Petersburg papers which arrived last night, of November 5th, we have received the account of the death of the Dowager-Empress of Russia, the mother of the present Czar. She was a German Princess, and without possessing the abilities of her mother-in-law, Catherine II., she exercised during the latter part of her life a great deal of influence in the empire.

During the reign of Catherine she lived as much as possible in a kind of seclusion, and had a difficult part to play between an empress, jealous of her power, and a husband naturally brutal and exasperated by the ill-treatment of the Court.

The accession of her husband to the throne rendered the situation still more distressing, as it converted his rudeness and imbecility into absolute insanity. It would be needless to say that his death inspired no regret and that his widow urged no measures of severity against his assassins.

With this cold and meagre tribute to the departed Czarina, I bring the story of Marie Feodorowna to a close.

That this was entirely a false view of her life her own chroniclers have sufficiently proved.

But the world's verdict is ever a cold, and often

an unjust one. It neither knew nor cared that in far-off Russia, a noble and beautiful life was ended. This life is one full of interest, for it is the history of the ancestors of the present dynasty—All eyes are now centred on that throne of Russia, whose rulers have descended in unbroken line from this "Mother of Czars."

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